MY FIRST GLASS.

AND OTHER STORIES

BY RUTH ELLIOTT.

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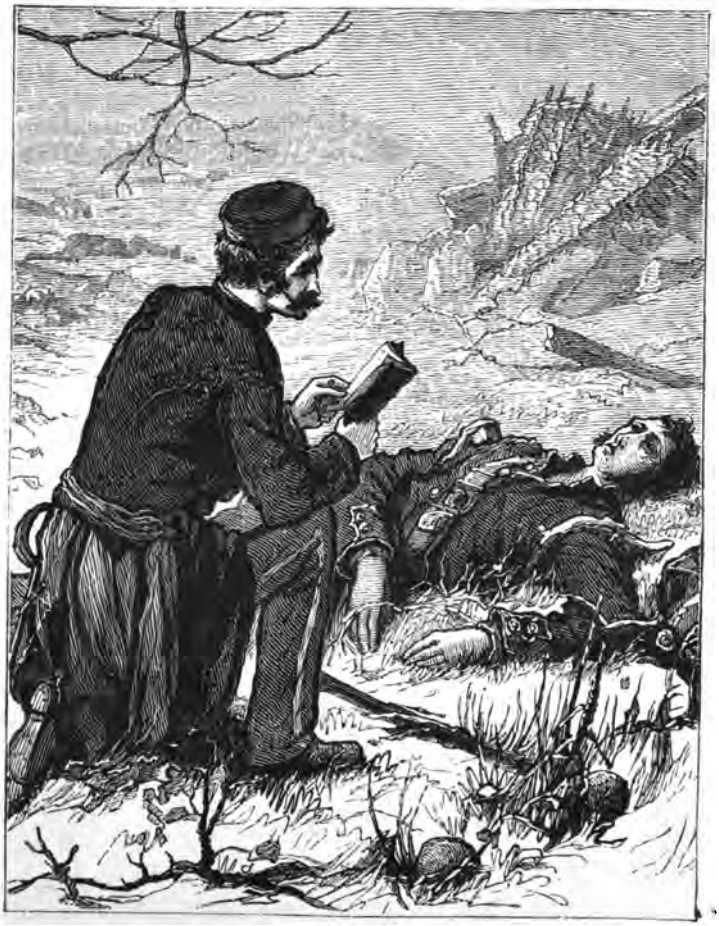

'MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU.' *See p. 72.*

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MY FIRST CLASS,

AND

OTHER STORIES.

By RUTH ELLIOTT,

AUTHOR OF 'JOHN LYON,' 'UNDECEIVED,' ETC.

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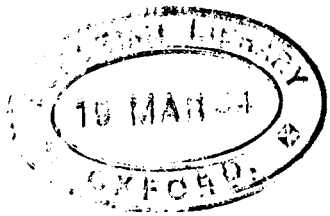

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MY FIRST CLASS.

I was only twelve years old when I first began to work in the Sunday-school. I had been a scholar myself till then; but when we went to our new Circuit, there was no class I could enter, so I began to entertain ambitious thoughts of being a teacher.

There was no infant-class in the school, though a number of little creatures used to come with their older brothers and sisters, and sit through the lesson-time in a state of utter weariness and misery, understanding nothing but that they must not move or make a noise. It was of these little ones, and others of a similar age, that I wished to form my class. My mother entered readily into my plans, and promised to speak to my father on the subject. We both knew quite well what he would say, but I had sufficient faith in my mother's persuasive powers to feel perfectly assured that all his objections would be overruled.

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As we had expected, his first words were, 'Ruth! why, she is only a child herself!'

'Yes,' said my mother, 'but quite old enough to talk to those little things; they will not want much teaching, and you know Ruth always had a way with children.'

'But I am afraid the Superintendent will think her too young,' objected my father.

'Perhaps he will at first, but he will soon find out that she knows how to manage them. Let the child try, William; she can do no harm, and may do much good; if we stop her now, she may have no desire to work for the Saviour when she grows older.'

So my father yielded, and the next morning I was told that I might set to work and gather a class together as soon as I liked. I was not at all shy, for being a minister's daughter I had been so accustomed to mingle with the people, that I had quite lost the restraint I might otherwise have felt before strangers; and as I went gaily from house to house, I found my visit and its object were received with the greatest cordiality.

'Surely' I might 'have the little un, her wurn't much of a scholard yet, her didn't know her letters, but her'd be fess to come to school.'

By 'fess,' I found, when I became acquainted with the dialect, was meant 'proud.'

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When I returned home I had a list of eight children, boys and girls, all about three, four, or five years old, whose mothers had promised to send them to school punctually at half-past nine the next Sunday morning. The school was held in the chapel, and I selected a large pew, with seats nearly all round, for my class. It was close to the door, and some distance from the other classes, which I thought a very good thing, as I neither wished to be overheard in my first attempts at teaching, nor that my little ones, if they proved noisy, should disturb the rest of the school.

My heart beat high with excitement as I took my seat at the top of the pew that first Sunday morning; it was, in my estimation, the most eventful day of my life! By degrees the school assembled, and I waited in anxious expectation; soon the door silently opened, and in crept a tiny maiden, looking very much frightened and awe-struck. It was my first scholar! Talk about the first brief! the first patient! or the first client, indeed! What are they in comparison with the 'first scholar' to the eager little Sunday-school teacher, with all her heart in her new work?

I lifted the little thing upon the seat, and then put her name down in my book. I doubt which of us felt the more embarrassed, Susie or I, as

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we sat in silence looking at each other; for as I could obtain no answer to any of my questions, I thought it best to leave her alone, hoping she would become more communicative when we were better acquainted. But we were not long left alone; one by one my little scholars made their appearance, till all the eight, and two others, were seated in solemn silence around me. In vain I tried to coax them to talk; they only stared at me with wide-open eyes, and only the more venturesome whispered, 'Yes,' or 'No,' in answer to my enquiries. However, I knew this would not last, and that the little tongues would soon regain their wonted elasticity. At the close of the opening prayer the Superintendent brought me a number of the First Lesson Books, which made me open my eyes in astonishment.

'What are they for?' I asked. 'The children do not even know their letters!'

'Well,' replied the old man, 'it is one of the rules of the school that the books shall be used, and the alphabet is in them.'

I looked at him with dismay.

'But, Mr. C—, I cannot teach the children to read, it will take all the time, and I want them to learn other things.'

The good man evidently felt bewildered; he

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wanted the rules to be kept, yet did not like to enforce them on me.

'Well, I will try and teach them the letters,' I said reluctantly, taking the books, and distributing them to the children; 'but I am afraid it won't be much good, Mr. C—.'

For about half-an-hour the little ones and I repeated A B C D over and over again, till we were weary of the sound, and gladly welcomed the signal for gathering up the books.

'I will have a different state of things this afternoon,' I said decisively, as we discussed the matter at the dinner-table. 'I don't believe Sunday-schools were ever intended to teach children to read.'

My father looked amused.

'And pray what do you think they are intended to teach?' he asked.

'Well, papa,' I replied, 'don't you think it would do the children more good to learn texts, and pretty hymns, than to spell c-a-t, cat, and d-o-g, dog? they can learn all that in the week.'

'Yes, dear, it is far more important that they should be taught the first lessons of Christianity; teach them to love Jesus, Ruth, and to love each other; that is the A B C of Christ's lesson-book.'

'And the X Y Z too,' observed my mother.

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'But, Ruth, you had better keep the rules, my dear; give the children twenty minutes of the alphabet in the morning, and take the rest of the time for your own lessons.'

We all thought this to be the best plan, and I started for school with a lighter heart. They were all there—the ten little mites, and not anything like so shy as they were in the morning. I wanted to find out how much they knew on Bible subjects, and asked them a few simple questions which I felt sure they could answer. One was, Where is heaven? I expected to hear the universal childish reply, 'up above the sky,' but to my surprise a little girl about five years old whispered, 'Up Paradise-lane.'

'Paradise-lane'! why, that was the singularly unhappy appellation of the dirtiest, filthiest and most miserable part of the town! What connection could there possibly be between that haunt of squalid poverty and the beautiful Paradise of the Bible? I gazed at the child in astonishment.

'Do you know what heaven is, dear?' I asked.

'Yes, I knows,' was the reply; 'the place good people goes to.'

'Well, what makes you think it is up Paradise-lane?'

'Dunno.'

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'Have you ever been there?'

'No.'

'Who told you heaven was there?'

'Dunno.'

I suppose the poor child had heard heaven spoken of as Paradise, and confused it with the only place of that name which she knew anything about. But, O dear! to think that the little thing's only idea of the happy land was derived from that wretched resort of the worst characters in the town! I could then scarcely understand such utter ignorance, and began to try her on another tack.

'Do you know what is above the sky, Abby?'

'Fleas,' was the sharp, unexpected reply.

'What!' I exclaimed, thinking I must have misunderstood her.

'Fleas,' said Abby, promptly.

What could the child mean? I was fairly puzzled, and looked almost hopelessly at the perplexing little piece of humanity before me. For a moment the thought crossed my mind, that perhaps she was 'a wee bit crackit,' as our Scotch neighbours say; but one look at the bright, intelligent face banished the idea, and turning to the other children, I asked if any of them knew what Abby meant. But no; Abby was one of the biggest there, and they evidently

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thought she ought to know what she was talking about, so I dismissed the subject is despair.

I found nearly all the class strangely ignorant of the simplest truths of the Bible. I say 'strangely,' because some of the parents were regular hearers at the chapel, and ought to have taught their children to love Jesus; but only three or four knew even Who He was. Abby seemed to have a vague idea that He was in some way connected with a sweep who lived next door to her home: but I readily accounted for this, knowing the man to be a notorious swearer, and she doubtless had frequently heard him breaking the third commandment.

Having found out, not how much, but how little, my class knew, I made them all stand round me, and in the simplest language I could think of, told them the old story of the little Baby Whose only cradle was a manger. They listened with great interest, and many were the enquiries as to whether He were 'like our baby?' or, 'Didn't His mother love Him, teacher?' But when I went on to tell how He grew up to be a Man, and cured all the sick people who were brought to Him, they crowded round me with eyes wide open with eager astonishment.

'Would He have made Johnny's burn well, teacher?' asked little Nellie, holding up her

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brother's hand, which was wrapped in a handkerchief.

'Yes,' I replied, taking the little fellow on my lap; 'He would have made Johnny's burn quite well.'

Immediately there began a regular chorus:

'Would He have made lame Joey well, teacher?'

'Would He have cured mother, teacher?'

'Would He have made my finger stop bleeding when I cut it so bad, teacher?'

And I cannot remember how many more questions of the same class. But I answered them all separately, telling them that Jesus would have cured 'mother,' and 'Joey,' and 'the cut finger,' and all the other aches and pains they mentioned; then I asked them if they didn't think they would have loved Him very, very much indeed.

'Yes,' replied Abby; 'bring Him here, teacher.'

'No, I couldn't do that,' I explained; 'He had gone back to heaven now, but He wanted them to go and see Him, and live with Him in a beautiful home He had got ready on purpose for them. The little things were delighted with the idea, and were quite ready and willing to march off to heaven there and then, if I would but have led the way. They didn't know—how

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should they?—that the road to heaven is often a long and weary one, and I did not tell them, for, to speak the truth, I did not know it myself. I was only a child, and a child's faith is very firm and unwavering; it was enough for me that Jesus had promised to take all who loved and served Him to be with Him in His own bright, beautiful home; and that I could cease to love Him never entered into my head, leave alone my heart.

I am afraid my little scholars were as ignorant of lesson-book lore at the close of the school, as they had been at the beginning, but I had gained two things,—their attention and their love. How easy it is to win a child's love! They held up their little faces for the farewell kiss as naturally and confidingly as if I had been an elder sister, and promised voluntarily to 'come again to-morrow.'

But they had learned one lesson, and that was,—that Jesus, the Son of God, loved them, and wanted them to be good little children, so that they might go and live with Him in a beautiful land: the first letter of Christ's alphabet.

My class increased rapidly; in a few weeks I had twenty names on my list, and the children attended regularly. But I found teaching not

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quite such easy work as I had fancied. Sometimes my little charge were sleepy, sometimes cross, and then my patience would be sorely tried. I wanted them to be always bright and winsome and lovable, not sullen and disobedient. Then I scarcely knew how to deal with them; I did not like to punish them, and could not bear to see them cry, it made me feel as if I were a tyrannical, cruel mistress, instead of a loving teacher and friend. I dreaded making them dislike me, and wanted them to mind me from love, and love alone.

I had, however, only one really troublesome child—a little girl about five, named Alice. Poor child! she had a most unhappy disposition, fretful, discontented and sullen. I always looked anxiously at her face on Sunday morning, to see what mood she was in. Her mother told me that at home they were all really afraid of her; she was subject to most peculiar and violent fits of passion; in which, with scarcely any provocation, she would fly at her brothers and scratch their faces or tear out their hair. The other children disliked and feared her, and at first she was a thorough little autocrat amongst them, ordering them about with a comical assumption of authority.

All the children were very covetous of the

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supposed honour and distinction of 'sitting by teacher;' and as the first arrivals took possession of the desired places, I generally found my little ones all seated before the time for opening the school. But Alice did not at all approve this state of things; she liked to sit by me, but did not like coming into school before she was obliged; so she hit upon an expedient which for some time answered her purpose well.

She would stop playing at the chapel gate, or near, till she saw me coming, and then with all the assurance imaginable would march into the pew with the announcement, 'Teacher's coming,' and sit down in my place. When I entered there was of course a little stir, and in the tone of a most injured person Alice would say, 'Don't squeeze so, Nellie! Go on; there isn't any room for teacher;' and so push her uncomplaining little neighbour further down the seat. After she had done this a few times, the other children rebelled, and formed a guard of honour round my seat to keep her off. This succeeded, but Alice sulked all the morning, and my enquiries as to the cause of her bad temper elicited the whole story from indignant Abby. This led to my ordering that the coveted places should be held by each in turn, beginning with the oldest. The first Sunday my new law

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came into operation, Alice was as good as gold! 'Too good to last!' was my amused, internal ejaculation. She learned her lessons without the slightest trouble, and then asked for more! She answered all the questions in the Scripture examination, and was quite maternal in her attentions to the little ones. But I am sorry to say this delightful state of things did not continue. The very next Sunday she came to school with a dark cloud on her pretty little face, and—alas, for my hopes of a reformation! —a still darker cloud on her heart.

The first thing she did was to walk up to little Nellie, lift her in her arms, and setting her roughly on the ground, coolly take possession of her seat. Of course there was an outcry from injured Nellie, who had to be kissed and comforted; while Alice was ignominiously expelled to the seat by the door, where she sat drumming her heels against the long wooden stool till school was over.

The audacity of the little thing was irresistibly amusing; and troublesome as she was, I really loved her. She struggled hard for the mastery, and for a time succeeded; for when she had made up her mind not to learn her lessons, and not to answer when spoken to, I had no means of forcing her to do so. I could not *make* her

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obey me, and at last I was almost in despair. She did not injure the others by exerting a bad influence upon them : rather the contrary, for I could give no more severe reproof than by saying they were nearly as naughty as Alice. They looked with a sort of horror upon her wild, disobedient ways, and were sometimes veritable little Pharisees in their self-righteous complacency.

At last things came to a crisis ; Alice openly defied me ! said, 'I sha'n't,' when I told her to be quiet. The children looked aghast, as well they might, and stared in speechless amazement, first at the little rebel, and then at me. I knew the time had come for me to take some decisive step, and a happy inspiration told me the right thing. Quietly rising, I took the astonished child in my arms and carried her out of the pew, and out of the chapel ; then I put her down. 'Go home, Alice,' I said, very gravely. 'I cannot have any little girls in my class who will not do as I tell them.'

This very unexpected proceeding completely overawed the child, and she stood still in utter bewilderment. I returned to my class, and went on with the lesson. In the interest of the Bible story we were talking about, the children forgot Alice, but I did not. I wondered what

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she would do, for I knew she would be afraid to go home. When school was over, there she stood, just where I had left her. She turned her head away as I passed, though not before I had seen the traces of tears on her face. This was a good sign, and I went home encouraged to hope that even this very black little lamb might yet become white.

The next Sunday she was at the chapel gate when I passed. I longed to stop and ask her if she would promise to be good for the future, but thought it best to leave her to herself till she should show signs of penitence, which she certainly did not then.

Little Nellie asked me very wistfully if Alice were never, never to come back any more; and I think nearly all the children were pleased when I said she should come back as soon as she would promise never to be so naughty again. It seemed to their innocent, little childish hearts something very dreadful to be expelled from school. I found four or five of them gathered round Alice at the gate in the afternoon, and as I drew near they looked at me with imploring eyes. I spoke a few words to them, and then sent them into school, and turned to Alice. She had been crying bitterly, and was still sobbing.

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'Well, Alice,' I said, taking her hot little hand in mine, 'what are you going to do this afternoon?'

For a few moments she could not speak; her sobs choked her utterance; and then she gasped out:—

'Can't I—come—to school, teacher?'

'What! to make a noise and disturb the other children! and to say, "I sha'n't," when I tell you to do anything?'

'O no! O no! I will be good, teacher! I will be good!'

She put both her little arms round my neck as I stooped toward her, and sobbed till I was really alarmed. It seemed as if she never would stop. I wiped away the streaming tears, and kissed the sorrowful little face, and we went into school hand in hand. From that time I had very little trouble with her; of course she was naughty sometimes, but a few words of grave reminder seldom failed to subdue the wilful little spirit.

Living near us was a family with several rough, noisy, neglected children. They lived in a good house, and were very well off. The father was away most of his time, and the mother had no more idea how to manage children than if they had been a menagerie of wild beasts. Control

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over them she had absolutely none, and they ran about the streets, as ragged and uncouth as possible. My acquaintance with them commenced in rather an unpromising way. For some weeks we had missed eggs from our hen-house, and were anxious to discover the thief. Our endeavours were for a long time all in vain, and we began to think we should never succeed. One Sunday evening I was sitting reading by the window overlooking the garden, when a slight noise attracted my attention; so glancing up, I saw one of these children, a boy about six or seven, creeping through the fence. I watched him into the hen-house, and then quietly went out and waited for his return. His sisters, however, were on the watch, and gave a quick alarm.

'Billy! Billy! run!'

But master Billy was not allowed to run; out he came, with an egg in each hand, to find himself a prisoner. I took firm hold of his two arms and marched him into the house, his sisters shrieking defiance after us. 'Bite her, Billy! bite her, and run away!' and a variety of other equally amiable suggestions. But Billy was far too frightened to do anything of the sort, even if he could.

'Are you going to send me to prison?' he roared. 'O! don't send me to prison! and I'll never do it again!'

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What to do with my captive I didn't know: at first I thought of keeping him till my father came home, but a second thought decided me not to do so. He would not want to be annoyed and troubled after a hard day's work. So I resolved to take the matter into my own hands this time, as I was alone in the house. Accordingly I sat down, holding the little culprit before me, and talked to him very gravely but kindly about his sinful conduct. Poor little fellow! he had never been taught to act better: he was almost as ignorant as a heathen. I told him how wrong it was to steal, but he did not seem to comprehend; and at last, with a warning, I let him go. He rushed off, delighted at his escape, and I heard him recounting his adventure to his sisters in quite a triumphant tone. However, we lost no more eggs, and from that time Billy looked upon me as a sort of acquaintance: instead of running away when he saw me, as I quite expected him to do, he would look up with a smile, and wait for me to come up to him. I always spoke to him, and at last asked him if he would like to come to school. At first he was very dubious about it, but one Sunday I found him waiting at the gate and took him in with me. I think his sisters strongly disapproved of this proceeding, but Billy did not

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care. He came regularly, and gave such glowing descriptions of school to them, that their curiosity was excited, and one day, to my great surprise, the second girl stopped me, and asked if she and her two sisters might come with Billy. I was rather perplexed; my class was for little ones, and the two elder girls were aged nine and eleven—too old for me. I told her so, and asked them to go to one of the other classes.

'No; if they didn't come to me, they wouldn't come to school at all.'

I did not know what to do; they were certainly too big for my class; but then, if they wouldn't go to another, wouldn't it be better for me to have them, and do my best with them? I thought that it would, so I gave them permission to come. At first they were very shy and quiet; I could not get a word out of them; but that soon wore off, and I found the eldest, Annie, a very intelligent, quick child.

Very doubtful glances were cast at my pew when these girls made their appearance; I think they created quite a sensation in the school. Mr. C—— came to me one day, and asked if it would not be better for them to go into a higher class. Of course I said yes, and asked him to take them—if they would go. The next

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Sunday he came to the pew, and opening the door told Annie and Lizzie to come with him and he would take them to a class of girls of their own age. Both the children looked sullen and angry; but, unobservant of these signs, Mr. C—— continued to urge them, and at last, out of patience with their dogged silence, he took hold of Annie's hand to lead her away. Then followed a scene. The two girls burst into angry, defiant sobs, and declared that if he wouldn't let them stay with Miss Ruth, they'd never come to school again! no, never!

Perfectly dismayed at the storm he had so unwittingly raised, Mr. C—— looked helplessly at me. Lessons throughout the whole school were suspended, and children and teachers were watching us with wonderment. Some thought Mr. C—— was expelling some one; some thought an accident had happened; others, that I was severely punishing a naughty child.

Very much annoyed, Mr. C—— was obliged to go, and leave the refractory children; and I, scarcely less astonished than he, gave them a good talking to; after which they professed great penitence for behaving so badly, but resolutely refused to prove their penitence by going into another class. They remained with me till we left the Circuit.

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I often wonder, in looking back upon the past, that I managed my class as well even as I did. I was so young, and had none of the wisdom which comes with experience. Fortunately my little charge was upon the whole docile, tractable, obedient and affectionate. I could hold out no worse threat than that I should be grieved with them if they were naughty; and the most severe punishment I ever inflicted was to send the offender to the corner next the door, there to stand in solitary misery until she could come and say she was truly sorry.

I think my success was owing in a great measure to my being the first teacher the children had ever known. They had not been scholars in the school before, and knew nothing of the change of rule and discipline consequent upon a change of teachers. I taught them in my own way, and had no former custom and habit to fight against.

Another thing which gave me a strong hold upon them was the intimate knowledge I had of their homes and every-day life. Not only on Sundays, but frequently during the week I saw them, and listened to their chatter of 'mother' and 'baby.' Any especial occurrence, whether of joy or sorrow, was treasured up to

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'tell teacher,' and I was quite learned in children's games.

I was often amused by the comical little pieces of information brought me on Sunday mornings.

'Teacher! we're going to have plum-pudding for dinner to-day!' would be Abby's abrupt announcement, as she rushed into school with eyes brimful of anticipation. Of course I was expected to enter into her delight. A new frock or hat was quite an event in the life of the little possessor, and not only 'teacher,' but the whole class must look and admire. A child's life is made up of seeming trifles. Little things make this world appear a Paradise, and little things with equal ease destroy the charm and dispel the illusion.

How often do we see the rough hand of indifference, as well as that of unkindness, dash all the glowing colours from the picture which the innocent child-eyes are gazing upon with eager delight! How often does an unnecessary harsh word or even gesture, chase the sunshine from the happy little face, and call up the heavy tears from wells that ought to be left for God's hand to reach. Bitter grief must come to all; it is so ordained. The little ones will have their share when their time comes, and surely it is

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not our place to bring clouds where God intended sunshine.

I did not always find teaching easy work. As was to be expected, I made mistakes, and had to reap the consequences. Sometimes I was too indulgent, and advantage was taken of it by the quick-sighted children. Sometimes I drew the rein perhaps a little too tightly, and they grew restive. Little children, such as composed my first class, must be allowed a certain liberty. It is absolute cruelty to endeavour to keep the active little limbs in perfect stillness for nearly an hour, and yet this is often done.

Sometimes I was puzzled how to act: peculiar circumstances called for peculiar action, and I knew not what to do. One of the children, a bright, nice little girl, about four or five years old, gave me much trouble. She was perfectly obedient and very affectionate, but had one great fault—she could not keep her little hands from taking what did not belong to her. The first time I detected her in a theft I could have cried with sorrow and disappointment. She was one of my especial pets, such a dear little thing, and in my eyes the offence was very great. I am not sure that I did not with the eyes of my imagination see in the dim future the heavy

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gates of a prison opening to receive poor little Trissie.

The worst of it was I could not get her to see the sinfulness of stealing. It was only a packet of sweets from one of the other children that she had taken, and she evidently thought I was making a great fuss about a very little thing.

I took for the subject of the afternoon's lesson the commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and endeavoured to make it as plain as possible to the children. All eyes were of course turned upon Trissie at once, as if the lesson concerned her, and no one else. The poor child began to look very uncomfortable and unhappy, and at last the hot tears came rolling slowly down her face. I took no notice of this, but diverted the children's attention from her by telling them the well-known little story of the boy who was kept from stealing by seeing the star shining above him, and by remembering the words, 'Thou God seest me.'

I made them repeat the two short texts after me till they knew them, and in the interest of the Lesson they forgot Trissie, who was furtively brushing away her tears, and trying to look as if she didn't care a bit.

When school was over I detained her a few

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minutes; but though she said she was sorry for taking the sweets, I could plainly see that her sorrow was owing to the consequences of the fault, not the fault itself. However, I thought it would be a lesson to her, and little expected, a few Sundays after, to hear the complaint, 'Teacher, Trissie has taken my apple,' with which Nellie greeted my entrance into school.

'I haven't,' exclaimed Trissie, trying to look innocent.

I never allowed eating during school-time: when the children brought apples or sweets with them, they were confiscated till after Lesson-time. Knowing this, Nellie, who had had the little rosy apple given to her on her way to school, had put it in the usual place, the corner of the window-sill. On turning to look at it a few minutes after, she found it was gone; and though no one had seen Trissie touch it, the theft was at once laid to her charge.

'Have you taken the apple, Trissie?' I asked, after hearing the rather confused statements volunteered by the children.

'No, teacher,' was the reply.

A general chorus of 'O, Trissie!'

In vain I talked, persuaded, urged her to confess; she persisted in her denial, and I began to think there was some mistake. Of her own

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free will she turned out her pocket to show me that the apple was not there, and I was about to tell her to sit down, when Abby cried out, 'Teacher, it's down her frock.'

The quick flush which rose to the conscious little face told me that this suggestion was correct, and finding further denial useless, Trissie put her hand just inside the top of her frock and took out the apple.

'O, Trissie!' I exclaimed, surprised and grieved, 'what am I to do to you?'

'Whip me, teacher,' sobbed the little thing, holding out her hand.

'No, I shall not whip you, Trissie. Children, what shall I do to make Trissie remember that it is very, very wrong to take what belongs to other people?'

'Give her a good whipping, teacher,' cried two or three, who were evidently accustomed to that style of punishment. I shook my head. 'Make her stand in the corner, teacher.' 'Send her home, teacher.' 'Tell the Superintendent. Don't give her any tickets, teacher.'

But Alice, my naughty, troublesome little Alice, my black lamb as I sometimes called her, came close up to me. 'Tell her not to do it again, and then forgive her, teacher,' she whispered.

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Trissie gave one quick glance, and then looked down again, while the other children stood round in silence. Well, I thought I would try Alice's plan, but resolved to put it to the vote, being pretty sure of the result.

'Which shall it be?' I asked. 'Shall I punish Trissie, or shall I forgive her this time?'

'Forgive her this time, teacher,' was the universal answer; so Trissie was forgiven. I was rather doubtful as to how this plan would answer, and watched the child anxiously for the next few weeks. It was, however, many months before I heard any more complaints of her, and then she confessed almost as soon as she was accused. Poor little Trissie! it was hard work for her to overcome this unhappy propensity, but she did try very hard, and I think succeeded at last.

It is with very mixed feelings I look back upon my first class: feelings of pleasure and pain. So it must ever be in this world; failures intermingled with successes, joys with sorrows. I can see now where I made mistakes, and I can also see that the success I met with was owing to the real, true love I had for the little ones under my care. The very first lesson that a Sunday-school teacher must learn is *love*. Without this all else will be useless.

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THE WONDERFUL NUMBER SEVEN.

'EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SEVEN! It ought to be a good year.'

'Why, papa?' asked Gertrude, looking up from her presents. 'Why should it be a good year?'

'Try and find out: there is something peculiar about it,' said her father, holding out his hand. It was an invitation Gertrude liked: it meant a seat on his knee and a long talk.

'Bring your presents with you,' said Mr. Marchmont. 'You had better ask Wallace to help you.'

Gertrude laughed. 'I have got a lot, haven't I, papa? I'll leave the big ones here and bring my picture and my Bible: O! I must bring my Bible. Papa, are you going to have a talk?'

'Do you want one?'

'You know I do. It's New Year's Day, papa.'

'And you think you ought to have a special talk, do you?'

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'Christmas days and New Years' days and birthdays, besides Sundays,' replied Gertrude, leaning on the arm of his chair. 'We are going to be with you all day, papa, Wallace and I.'

'I'm going out,' interrupted Wallace.

Gertrude's face flushed, and she looked appealingly at her father.

'Never mind,' he said, smiling; 'we shall do very well together, Gertie.'

'I'm not going out all day,' said Wallace, remorsefully. 'I will stay with you, papa, a long time.'

'Go out while the sun shines, and come home when it gets dusk and cold,' replied his father. 'It is a splendid day for the ice, my boy.'

'I won't go if you'd rather I stayed at home, papa.'

'I would rather have you on the ice, Wallace, it will do you good. Run away with you.'

Wallace looked dissatisfied: he was wondering if his father were at all vexed with him. Gathering up his presents he put them all away, and then went to put on his boots. 'Good-bye, papa,' he said, coming in equipped for the ice. 'Are you at all vexed with me?' The clear eyes looked anxiously down, and Mr. Marchmont smiled.

'Not at all, Wallace.'

'Not one tiny bit, papa?'

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'Not one tiny bit.'

'I wish you could come with me, papa.'

'Ah!' said his father, with a sigh: 'I wish so too, my boy. It will be many a long day before I go on the ice again.'

Wallace looked sober for a minute, then the sound of voices recalled to him the fact that the boys were waiting for him. He rushed off, and after watching him out of sight, Gertrude came back to her father.

'Papa, can you nurse me? Will it tire you?' she asked wistfully.

'Not your light weight, Gertie: besides, my little girl has no one else to nurse her. I am mother and father too.'

Gertrude nestled down in his arm, happy and contented. 'It is nice here,' she said. 'Now, papa, talk.'

'What about?'

'Why should this be a good year?'

'Well, I think it should because it is rather peculiar.'

'I don't see how,' said Gertrude, looking puzzled.

'We will try to find out. What year is it?'

'Eighteen hundred and seventy-seven.'

'What is the difference between this and last year?'

'Only seven instead of six.'

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'That is just it,' said Mr. Marchmont, smiling at her perplexed look. 'It is the seven that makes it peculiar in my eyes.'

'But why, papa? I don't understand.'

'Can you remember anything singular about the number seven?'

Gertrude thought, and at last shook her head; 'I never heard anything curious about it, papa.'

'Then we will find it out. How many days in the week are there?'

'O, I know that! I didn't know you meant that, papa,' said Gertrude, disappointed.

'Who ordained the seven days, Gertie?'

'God,' said Gertie, softly.

'A certain king once had some strange dreams, and was very anxious to find out what they meant. Do you remember?'

'About seven ears of corn, and seven kine: seven again, papa!'

'There was once a general who had a painful disease, and a prophet told him of a cure: who was that?'

'Naaman! he had to dip *seven* times in Jordan,' said Gertrude, beginning to feel interested. 'Wait one minute, papa: tell me, are there many more?'

'Why?'

'I should like to keep count: I cannot, unless I put them down.'

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Mr. Marchmont waited while his little daughter fetched pencil and paper. 'Now, papa,' she said.

'Well, can you not think of one yourself?'

'Jacob had to wait seven years for his wife,' said Gertrude, after a great deal of thought.

'So he had: I had forgotten that!' said her father, smiling.

'They had to walk seven days round Jericho, and O! the seventh day they had to walk seven times. Papa, what a lot of sevens!'

'Go on; you have not found half yet.'

'It is like a game,' said Gertrude, laughing; 'I like it.'

'You can find some more if you think, little one.'

'Seven devils,' said Gertrude, thoughtfully. 'Didn't Jesus cast out seven devils? O yes! and seven loaves, papa! don't you remember? He fed them—the four thousand, you know—with seven loaves. It is strange, isn't it? What others are there? I can't remember any more.'

'Have you read much in the Revelation?'

'Not very much, papa. Shall I look now?'

There was a short silence while she turned over the leaves of her new Bible, her father's new-year's gift, and then she read aloud,—

'"John to the seven churches;" is that the one you mean?'

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'One of them. Go on.'

'Seven golden candlesticks; seven stars; that is all in this chapter.'

'Turn to the fifth.'

'A book "sealed with seven seals." O dear, papa; I shall never remember them all!'

'I do not expect you to do so, dear. When you are older you will find many more sevens in the Bible. But there are three more I particularly want my little girl to think of. One of the disciples, Peter, once asked Jesus a question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" What was the answer?'

'"Until seventy times seven,"' said Gertie, soberly. 'Must I forgive Wallace seventy times seven when he teases me?'

Mr. Marchmont smiled at the grave little face. 'Is it very hard to forgive?'

'Sometimes it is: *must* I do it?'

'We will talk about that another time. Does my little daughter remember Calvary?' asked Mr. Marchmont.

'Yes, papa,' whispered Gertrude.

'Does she remember how many times the Saviour spoke?'

Gertrude thought. 'No: did He speak seven times, papa?'

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'Let us count. Did He forgive His enemies, those who were putting Him to such a cruel death?'

'He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Yes, He forgave them, or He would not have asked God to forgive them, I suppose.'

'When the thief entreated Him to remember him, what did He say?'

'"To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Papa, I never counted them before.'

'Then when He saw His mother weeping at the foot of the cross, and His loving, faithful disciple, He had a thought of kindness for them: "Behold thy son!" and to John, "Behold thy mother!" That is three times.'

'I know the fourth, papa,' whispered Gertie; 'He was thirsty.'

'Yes, and said, "I thirst." Then came that mysterious darkness on the land, and He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"'

Mr. Marchmont paused, and Gertie looked up. 'Papa, that was the worst of all!'

'Why?'

'He felt as if His Father frowned on Him. I know it was the worst, because it is so dreadful when you look angry with me. But the next was better, papa, because at last He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."'

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'Yes; but He said other words first: what?'

'What were they, papa? I forget.'

'Think, dear. Did He leave His work unfinished?'

'No: I know now, "It is finished." That is seven times,' said Gertie, softly. 'I'm glad: I like it.'

'Like what?'

'The seven times: it is a good number. What is the other seven?'

'You must find that out for yourself.'

'But how can I, papa?'

'I will give you a clue: it has to do with the Lord's Prayer.'

'The Lord's Prayer! Won't you tell me, papa?'

'This evening I will. Try and find it out. Now do you think this ought to be a good year, Gertie?'

'Yes, papa. It will be a good year to me if you get well.'

'And to me if I see my children living the Lord's Prayer,' said Mr. Marchmont, stroking her hair.

'Living the Lord's Prayer!' cried Gertie, raising her head in astonishment; 'how can we?'

'Wait till this evening, and we will see,' replied her father. And Gertie had to wait.

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THE LORD'S PRAYER.

'WALLACE, papa has got something to tell us about the Lord's Prayer.'

Wallace looked up impatiently. 'Be quiet, Truda; how can I read when you talk so?'

'But don't you want to hear it, too?' persisted his little sister. 'Wallace, do you know this is such a funny year?'

'What's it funny about?'

'It is eighteen hundred and seventy-seven, you know; it is the seven that makes it funny; isn't it, papa?'

'I don't see what you mean. There's nothing queer in seven: it is only a number,' said Wallace, returning to his book.

'O, but there is something queer in it!' said Gertie, eagerly. 'Tell him, papa.'

'He wants to go on with his book,' replied Mr. Marchmont, quietly. 'Let him read, Gertie, and you come and talk to me.'

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'I can't find it out, papa,' said Gertie. 'I have counted the sentences, but there are more than seven, and I can't think of anything else.'

'Do you know what a petition is, Gertie?'

'It means asking for something, doesn't it?'

'Yes: now how many things do you ask for when you repeat the Lord's Prayer?'

Gertie thought. '"Give us this day our daily bread;" that's one, papa.'

'But what comes before that?'

'We don't ask for anything,' said Gertie.

'Let us see: how do you begin?'

'"Our Father Which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy——"'

'Stop!' said her father, lifting his finger. 'What does that mean? "hallowed be Thy Name."'

'Hallowed means sacred, doesn't it, papa? It means that we mus'n't take God's Name in vain.'

'Not exactly that we must not. In another part of the Bible we are told that we *must not:* but this is rather different. This prayer is for us to use, and we don't want to tell God what we must not do; He knows that already.'

'So He does,' said Truda, looking perplexed. 'It seems as if we were asking Him to let His Name be hallowed.'

'That is just it, dear: now you have got it.

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"Hallowed be Thy Name" is the first petition in the Lord's Prayer. We ask God to put it into every one's heart to keep His Name sacred and holy. That is one prayer. Now, go on.'

'"Thy kingdom come,"—why, papa, that is another petition! I never knew! "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:" that is the third. Papa! I guess: there are seven prayers! Is that it?'

Mr. Marchmont smiled. 'Count them.'

'"Give us this day our daily bread;" that is four. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" five. "Lead us not into temptation;" six. "But deliver us from evil;" seven. "For Thine *is* the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen." Papa, there *are* seven!'

'Does my little girl know what they all mean?' said Mr. Marchmont.

'You told me the first. "Thy kingdom come:" I think I know what that means, too, only I can't say it.'

'Over what people does God reign?'

'Over all who love Him, papa.'

'Then it is not God's kingdom where the people do not love Him?'

'Of course not! that is the devil's kingdom,' replied Truda.

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PAPA, WALLACE, AND GERTIE. *See p.* 46.

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'Then when you pray for God's kingdom to come, you are really praying that people may learn to love Him, for He cannot have a kingdom without.'

'Then, papa, I may as well say, "Make everybody love Thee."'

'It would mean very much the same thing. What is the next petition in the Lord's Prayer?' asked Mr. Marchmont.

'"Thy will be done;" that is easy,' said Gertrude.

'Easy to do?' asked her father, with a keen look in his eyes.

'Papa, no; it is very hard sometimes, but it is easy to understand.'

'I am not so sure about that. How do you understand it?'

'Why, that everybody must do what God wants them to,' said Gertie.

'But *how* must they do it?'

'I don't know what you mean, papa.'

'Finish the petition.'

'"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."'

'But how is it done in heaven? How can we know how it is done there? Who do His will up there, Gertie?'

'The angels, I suppose; but I don't know *how*.'

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'Do they do it unwillingly, and because they must, do you think?'

'O no, papa! they do it willingly.'

'Do they do it slowly, loitering over it, making one piece of work last as long as possible?'

Gertie could not help smiling. 'I expect they fly to do it, papa, and are as quick as ever they can be. Does God want us to do His will just as angels do it? Papa, that would be very hard.'

'It is impossible without one thing,' said her father: 'we must have God in our hearts, little one, and love Him very, very dearly. What makes you run to fetch things for me, even when you are in the middle of a game with Nina? I have never to ask my little girl twice to do anything for me.'

'O, papa,' said Gertie, laying her face on his hand; 'I love you so much!'

'And love makes you do my will gladly, quickly and cheerfully?'

'Yes, papa.'

'And it is love that will teach us to do our Father's will as the angels do it.'

'Papa,' said Wallace, looking suddenly up, 'how is one to know what God's will is?'

'O, Wallace, have you been listening?' cried Gertie.

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'How do you know Mr. Newton expects you and the other boys to do certain things?'

'Do you mean the rules? They are printed and hung up, you know.'

'So are God's rules.'

'You mean the Bible; but it doesn't tell everything, papa.'

What doesn't it tell?' asked Mr. Marchmont, turning round and looking at his son.

Wallace coloured. 'O, lots of things!'

'Tell me one.'

Wallace hesitated. 'Well, papa,' he said at last, 'Tom wanted me to stay with him this morning instead of going skating, and he said I was selfish, and it was wicked.'

'Wicked!' echoed Gertie. 'Why, Wallace, what did he mean? it isn't wicked to skate.'

'Of course it isn't! Do you think it was, papa?'

'That depends. Why didn't Tom go? he is very fond of skating.'

'He—he was afraid,' replied Wallace; 'he thought the ice wasn't safe; he's a coward.'

What made him think the ice was not safe?' asked his father, quietly.

Wallace got redder and redder. 'O, some muff went on and said it cracked!'

'Who was the muff?'

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'Mr. Lennox,' said Wallace, reluctantly.

'Did Mr. Lennox tell you not to go on the ice?'

'No; he only said it was not safe.'

'He took it for granted that you would not go after that?'

'I suppose he did,' muttered Wallace, crossly. 'It was no business of his; it isn't school-time.'

'And you really did not know if it were right or wrong to go? Poor boy!'

'Papa, why do you call him "poor boy"?' asked Gertie; while Wallace looked uncomfortable.

'Don't you think it must be very miserable not to be able to tell if you are doing right or wrong? it makes one so helpless. Wallace,' said his father, 'did you try to find out if it were right? I do not like to feel that my boy really cannot tell right from wrong; it will make me very unhappy. Did you *think?*'

'Not much, papa,' said Wallace, honestly. 'I wanted to go.'

'Ah! that was it: your prayer was not "Thy will," but mine "be done." Is that it, my boy?'

'O, papa! he didn't say that,' said Gertie.

'Not in word, perhaps; but in deed. Are you going to alter the Lord's Prayer, Wallace?'

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'It was such a little thing.'

'Life, your life at any rate, is made up of little things. He is a poor soldier who refuses to obey in small things. Suppose no great service is ever demanded of you, will you, therefore, refuse to do anything?'

'Why, no papa; of course not.'

'Papa,' said Gertie, 'is that what you meant when you said you wanted us to live the Lord's Prayer?'

'Partly: if I could feel sure my children really meant the seven petitions, I should not be so anxious about their future.'

'Papa,' whispered Gertie, 'I'll try.'

Mr. Marchmont smiled at the earnest face. 'I'll think my little girl does try.'

Wallace took up his book and went on reading; the talk was not quite to his taste.

Shortly after this conversation, Truda sat on the floor in her bed-room, with a box of coloured beads in her lap. On a stool by her side stood a tray, and on the tray a number of little glass-lidded boxes, into which she was sorting the beads.'

'Truda.'

'Yes.'

'Where are you?'

'Here,' said Truda.

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'Where's *here?*' and Wallace came bounding upstairs, three at a time. 'You've got to come downstairs and mend my jacket-sleeve, directly.'

'Who says so?' asked Truda, looking up in dismay.

'Who says so?' mimicked Wallace. 'Father says so; so there, miss. Now are you coming?'

'I don't believe father did say so,' said Truda, doubtfully.

'Didn't he though! you'd better go and ask him.'

'Isn't Mr. Forbes with him?'

'Yes, but what does that matter! Go in and say, "Father, please, must I mend Wallace's sleeve?"' said her brother, in the whining tone which he knew was especially provoking to his little sister.

'Go and ask Jane to mend it, you disagreeable boy.'

'Jane is busy, and I mean you to do it.'

'I won't!' said Truda, indignantly; 'you can't make me.'

'Can't I?' said her brother, coolly; 'I think I can, Miss Gertrude. If you don't come and do it at once I'll upset all these beads.'

Truda screamed and seized the tray, but Wallace was stronger than she.

'You might as well take it quietly,' he said,

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unclasping her fingers from one of the boxes. 'Now, I'll give you while I count three. One, two, will you? three, then;' and down went the red beads on the floor, scattered in all directions.

'I won't touch your old sleeve,' cried Truda, in a passion of sobs. 'You're a wicked boy, Wallace, and I wish you'd go away and never come back again!'

'One, two, three,' said Wallace, slowly, 'blues to follow;' and the second box was turned upside down.

Suddenly checking her sobs, Truda gave a gasp and sat quite still.

'Well?' said Wallace, looking at her: 'are you ready?'

'No,' was the determined reply.

'O! very well: please yourself;' and down went the yellow beads.

The little girl tried hard to keep back the tears, but they would come welling up in her eyes and almost blinding her. It had taken her so long to sort the beads, and now her work must all begin afresh! it was very hard.

She did not speak again, and this disconcerted Wallace. It was good fun to tease her and work her up into a passion and laugh at her rage; but there was no fun in seeing only a little, still,

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'NOW, I'LL GIVE YOU WHILE I COUNT THREE.' *See p. 52.*

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white face, with downcast eyes, and big rolling tears; so, having mixed all the beads, he scattered them with his feet, and went off, out of humour with his little sister and with himself, though he would not have owned it for the world.

'I wonder what she will do,' he thought, as he walked down the street; 'she'll pay me out, I suppose; little vixen!'

He did not feel at all comfortable as he ran over the list of his belongings, and wondered which one she would take her revenge upon.

Something of the same sort was passing through Truda's mind as she sat motionless where he had left her: 'What should she do to pay him out?' that was her question.

She did not stay very long on the floor. Sweeping all the beads into the box, she put them in a drawer out of sight, and then sat down on her favourite seat by the window. This window looked into the orchard, which was now bare and leafless. The sun was shining, but there was not much warmth in its rays, and after a while she began to feel cold. A gentleman was with her father, so she went down to the kitchen, and sat on the dresser while Jane made a pudding for dinner. She was very fond of making puddings herself, and Jane liked to

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teach her; but she was too late this morning, so was obliged to be content with watching.

'What a funny thing a pudding is,' she said, as Jane put it into the oven; 'I don't like many of the things by themselves much, but the pudding is nice.'

'A pudding is like a family,' said Jane, who was given to moralizing occasionally: 'there's good and middling, but seems as if we can't do without one.'

'O! cried Truda: 'what am I, Jane? am I the flour?'

'No; master's the flour that keeps the pudding together, you may say. Maybe you are the candied peel, or the sugar.'

'Am I sweet, then?' said the little one, opening her eyes.

Jane laughed. 'Sometimes; not always.'

'What is Wallace, Jane? he isn't sweet, I'm sure. I think he's the pinch of salt!'

'Well, we want a pinch of salt,' said Jane, who firmly believed that no dish of any description could be perfect without salt.

Truda pondered: 'I like being the sugar; what are you, Jane?'

'The baking-powder,' said Jane; not knowing what to say: but this did very well, as neither was quite sure what office the powder performed.

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The hall-door closed, and Truda ran up to her father. 'Papa,' she cried abruptly, 'do you know you are flour?'

'No, indeed! that *is* news,' replied her father, laughing.

'In the pudding, I mean,' went on Truda, trying to explain. 'Jane says, and I'm the sugar.'

Mr. Marchmont began to understand. 'Come and tell me all about it,' he said; and Truda began.

'Don't you think Wallace is the pinch of salt, papa?' she said, anxiously, as she finished the story.

'Then if he is we shall want all the more sugar; for Wallace makes a very good pinch of anything.'

'He is so unkind,' said Truda, her eyes filling with tears.

'Poor little girl! he does tease her, I know,' said her father, fondly: 'what shall I do to him?'

'Nothing, papa.'

'Then what will you do to him?'

Truda did not answer.

'There are two ways of managing that pinch of salt,' said her father, quietly: 'one is to cover it and mix it with so much sugar that it is hardly noticed in the pudding.'

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Truda understood. 'It's the Lord's Prayer again,' she said soberly.

'Which part of it, Truda?'

'Forgiving, papa, isn't it? it's just the same, only it's different.'

Her father smiled. 'Differently expressed, but the spirit is the same. Yes, put it how you will, it comes back to the Lord's Prayer.'

'Are you tired, papa?' asked Truda, anxiously, as he closed his eyes. He did not answer, and she sat in silence, smoothing his hair with her little hand. Mr. Marchmont often said that his little daughter was his best nurse.

In a little while she saw that he was asleep, and leaving her seat, she slipped out of the room. The library door was open, and as she passed it she paused and looked in. On the window-ledge in the sun lay a little shell-box, which Wallace had placed there to dry. A curious thought came into the child's mind: suppose she dipped the box in hot water, wouldn't that loosen the shells? She drew in her breath as she thought of it. What a splendid revenge that would be! and besides, Wallace would never find out how she had done it. There was some fun in it as well as revenge, and she turned toward the kitchen to get the hot water.

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At the foot of the stairs she paused again, irresolute. Suppose she did this, what would be the result? Wallace would be vexed, for he had made the little box with great care. But it was not Wallace she was specially thinking of, though he did come into her mind.

'If I do it,' she said to herself, 'I can't say the Lord's Prayer to-night. I can't ask God to forgive me when I won't forgive Wallace. What shall I do?'

It was hard to give up this novel way of paying Wallace, but it seemed much harder to the little girl to go to bed without saying 'Our Father.' She had never missed since she was a tiny little thing in the nursery, and she could not imagine what it must feel like to go to bed without.

'O dear,' she said, with a little sob, 'I wish it was easier to be good!' and then she put her head down on her kitten, who had crept into her arms, and what she did I think all my readers must guess. After a while she got up, and without looking at the box, went back to the parlour. Wallace came in to dinner, and looked anxiously round the room. The last time he had offended his sister she had mixed all the paints on his pallet; he could see no signs of her handiwork now.

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He went upstairs, and marvelled to find everything as he had left it. All dinner-time he was unusually quiet, feeling rather anxious about his sister's state of mind. The fact was he somewhat distrusted the sober look on her usually bright little face ; he thought it meant mischief.

Their father saw that something was wrong between them ; but he knew how to read his little daughter's face far better than Wallace did, and thought it best to leave them to themselves.

When dinner was over, Truda opened her work-box.

'I will mend your sleeve now, Wallace,' she said. He looked very much astonished, and a little bit ashamed as he stood very still while she stitched away, and when she had finished, he said graciously :

'I will have a game with you, if you like, Truda, I'm not going out again.'

Truda understood ; this was Wallace's way of 'making up,' as the children call it. So she felt very hopeful that after all Wallace would turn out something nicer than a 'pinch of salt.'

So the Lord's Prayer was said that night, after all.

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GERTRUDE'S VALENTINE.

IT was Valentine's Day: Wallace and Gertrude stood at the window watching for the postman in a state of great excitement.

'There he is! No, he isn't! What time is it? I don't believe he's coming at all!' cried Gertie in despair, as for the twentieth time she thought she saw the old postman's familiar coat.

As she turned round to look at the clock, Wallace sprang off the chair on which he had been kneeling, and rushed to the door with a triumphant shout. It really was the postman this time, and Gertrude followed on the tip-toe of expectation.

'O! let me see, Wallace,' she said, trying to pop her head under his arm as he held the door ajar. 'Do let me see. Where is he now?'

'He's got nothing for you: who in the world would send you a valentine? There he is! O, what a lot!'

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'Where? who? Is he taking a lot to Polly's?' cried Gertie, almost beside herself with excitement.

'There's Polly come out,' went on Wallace, calmly; 'she's holding one up. O, my!'

It was more than poor little Gertie could bear. Collecting all her strength she gave him one great push, and as he was standing on tip-toe and was off his guard, down the steps he went, and tumbled headlong among the snow-drops.

Didn't Gertie laugh! it was not often she gained a victory over Wallace.

'That just serves you right, Master Wallace,' said Jane, who had been peeping out of the window upstairs.

'One, two, three: hum! Miss—Miss—G e r—'

'It's mine, Wallace! Miss Gertrude Marchmont. Give it me,' cried Gertie, as Wallace came slowly up the steps, holding the bundle of valentines tightly in his hand.

'There you are,' said Wallace, throwing half-a-dozen big envelopes down on the table before her. 'Now open them, and let us have a look.'

'Papa, did you ever see such beauties?' cried Gertrude. 'Aren't they lovely! Come

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and see, Jane. Here's one more; a little one,—O!'

She stopped short, and stood gazing at the paper with a curious expression of mingled incredulity, anger and grief.

'What is the matter?' asked her father.

She went round to his chair and put her head down on his shoulder with a sob:

'Polly sent it!'

It was not a nice valentine. First, there was a picture of a little girl with very red hair and very red cheeks, and a funny little nose that turned right up; not a pretty little girl by any means. Underneath was written:

'GERTIE,
Red hair, not fair;
Turn-up nose, torn clothes,
Very dirty.
Always cross: it's no loss
When she stays away for days.
That's Gertie.
POLLY R.'

'O papa!' sobbed Gertie, 'isn't it dreadful? Isn't Polly unkind?'

'Have you had a quarrel with Polly?' asked her father.

'Only the tiniest little bit of one, papa. She said I had red hair, and I said I'd rather have red hair than green eyes.'

Soon Wallace went off to school. Gertrude

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had not been well, and was staying at home for a few days.

'Well!' said her father, after watching her sober little face for a few minutes.

'I wouldn't have sent *her* such a horrid valentine,' said Gertie, with a sob.

'Suppose you send her one; a very horrid one?'

Gertie opened her eyes wide. 'It would serve her right.'

'Well, suppose we try to make a very bad one. I dare say we can manage it. She does not like you to say she has green eyes?'

'No: she can't bear it.'

'Fetch my pen and paper, and we will begin.'

Gertrude fetched writing materials, and put them by her father, looking very grave.

'Now, then, shall I begin with the eyes? and what else have you to say she would not like?'

Gertrude thought: 'She's cross sometimes,' she said, doubtfully; 'and she was punished three times last week for talking in school; but she doesn't like me to say anything about it.'

'I must not put that, then?'

'No: it would be too unkind.'

'Do you want to hurt her mind very much, or only a little?'

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Gertie did not speak. Suddenly she turned round: 'Papa, I don't want to hurt her mind at all,' she whispered.

Her father drew her down on his knee and kissed her.

'How would you like to send her a nice valentine that would make her love you again? Would that be better?'

Gertie nodded. 'Please, papa,' she said, 'make a nice one; at least not a very bad one.'

Her father laughed. 'Think it over a bit, and we will write it presently.'

She went upstairs, but in a few minutes came back again. 'I've made up my mind, papa: it shall be a nice one.'

Her father looked down into the bright little face: 'Not one unkind word just at the end?'

'O, papa! you're laughing. That would spoil it.'

For a few moments Mr. Marchmont was busy writing: Gertrude watched him anxiously. 'Will this do?' he said at last:

'POLLY,
Straight nose, nice clothes,
Golden hair, very fair,
Like a dolly.
Seldom cross, it's a loss
When she stays away for days.
That's Polly.

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Fun and frolic, such a rollick!
Come and see, and stay to tea,
Please, Polly:
GERTRUDE M.'

'O, papa!' cried Gertrude, enchanted: 'that is lovely! It's real poetry, too.'

Mr. Marchmont laughed: he did not call it poetry at all; but then the sentiment is the thing to be considered in a valentine, and that was quite correct.

'And is she really to come to tea, papa?'

'I should think no young lady would dream of refusing an invitation brought by St. Valentine himself.'

'Jane must take it,' said Gertie. 'Shall she go now?'

Her father took her two hands and looked into the happy blue eyes: 'Are you sending it very unwillingly, Gertie?'

She looked astonished. 'No, papa! willingly. I'm glad we're doing it.'

'So am I glad to find my little daughter can do so cheerfully what might naturally be thought a hard task. People often spoil even a kind deed by an unkind way of doing it. Now run and give it to Jane.'

In the afternoon Polly came. Of course there were all the valentines to be admired and criticised, and guesses made as to who sent them.

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'Did you have any horrid ones?' asked Polly.

'Only yours,' replied Gertie, wishing Polly had not asked such a tiresome question.

Polly opened her eyes wide. 'Mine!' she said; 'I never sent you one!'

'O, Polly!' cried Gertie, reproachfully: 'not about my nose and hair?'

'What about them?' asked Polly, more puzzled than ever.

'You said my hair was red, and my nose turned-up,' said Gertie, with half a sob.

'I didn't!' replied Polly, indignantly; 'who says I did?'

Then of course the valentine had to be brought out, and she saw her own name on it.

'I never sent the thing!' she exclaimed.

It was now Gertie's turn to be mystified. 'Who did send it, then?' she asked, looking first at Polly and then at the valentine.

'O! I know,' cried Polly, at last; 'it was only that Wallace; I shouldn't care a bit for him, Gertie.'

'But how do you know he sent it?' asked Gertie, not feeling quite sure about it.

'Because he asked me the other day how to spell clothes, and when I told him he said he was writing some poetry, but he wouldn't tell me what. Let's pay him out.'

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Just at that minute Wallace opened the door and came in. 'Halloo, Polly, you here?' he said. Wallace was very fond of Polly.

Polly made no reply, but with great dignity turned her back to him.

'What's up?' he said; but he knew, for the valentine was lying on the rug. Still Polly took no notice: he could not make her speak to him, do what he would. All tea-time she talked away to Gertie and to their papa, but not one word was there for Wallace; not even a look. He did not like it at all.

After tea lessons had to be learnt, and then Gertie and Polly played together, while Wallace sat by the fire, pretending to read.

Then supper was brought in, and as the children sat round the fire eating their bread and milk and cake, Polly began to moralize: 'It is mean of boys to send horrid valentines to girls,' she said, with a side look at Wallace; 'I'm glad my brother doesn't do such things. I hate mean boys.'

Wallace looked uncomfortable, but went on reading.

'Some boys,' continued Polly, meditatively, 'think they can do just as they like; they can be disagreeable and cross, and send horrid valentines, and then expect their sister and—and

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me, to like them ever so much! but we don't.'

'This was the climax. Making a snatch at the valentine, Wallace threw it in the fire.

'There the old thing is, then,' he said, trying to laugh, but looking a little ashamed. 'Shut up, Polly: I've had quite enough of your sermons.'

'You shouldn't deserve them, then,' said Polly, severely. 'I'm going to try and make a nice boy of you; but I don't think it's much use.'

'I'll be nice,' said Wallace, who was tired of reading and being sent to Coventry. 'How did you find out I sent it?'

'Never mind: that's our secret.'

'O! Gertie doesn't care, do you, Gertie? I meant to tell her. I didn't think she'd go and ask you to come to tea and spoil it all.'

'She's a dear, good girl,' said Polly, hugging Gertie; 'she thought I sent it, and yet she sent me that nice one.'

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AN INCIDENT IN THE CRIMEAN WAR.

THE battle was over! all day long it had raged, but now the conflict had ceased, for the victory was won.

A dearly-won victory! The life-blood of many a gallant heart stained the turf, and upon countless homes had fallen the darkness of the shadow of death. Throughout the length and breadth of the land was heard the wail of mourning, and the sobs of the widowed and fatherless mingled with the triumphant swell of the martial music. Sorrow and gladness walked hand in hand; the sound of the requiem ascended with the glad *Venite exultemus*, and the flag of victory waved over the open grave.

Upon the solemn battle-field, among the wounded, the dying and the dead, lay one who had fought bravely and well through the battle's wild alarm. The dimness of death was upon his eyes; its icy hand was stopping the slow beating

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of his heart, and checking the current of his blood.

He was dying, and he knew it! The cries of victory had fallen upon unheeding ears; and now, in the quiet evening, he lay, silent and still, waiting for the end.

Searching for the living among the dead, two of his comrades found him there, and with gentle hands lifted him, to carry him to the camp. All tender as they were, the movement was more than he could bear, and stifling the moan upon his lips, he bade them lay him down and let him die in peace.

They laid him down, and stood beside him with uncertain will. It seemed so cruel to leave him there, untended and alone; 'besides,' they said, 'to leave him here means death.' So once more they raised him in their arms, and with slow and steady step proceeded on their way.

But the cold sweat broke out upon his brow, and the dim eyes looked the entreaty that his lips refused to speak. To carry him further was but to hasten his death; there was no mistaking now the impress of the great destroyer's hand, and again they laid him gently down upon the blood-stained turf, and left him there to die.

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And now he was alone. Around him lay the silent forms of gray old veterans; of fair-haired boys, upon whose blue-veined foreheads no loving hands would ever more be placed; of stalwart men, whose cold lips wore the curve of stern determination. No comrade's hand was there to wipe the death-dews from his brow, or raise his dying head. He was alone, and what visions rose before him none can tell.

It may be he went back to the careless, happy days of childhood, and dreamed of the dear old home. It may be he heard, in fancy, voices long silent, and saw around him faces once dear and cherished. It may be he saw the heavens opened, and radiant white-winged messengers waiting to take him home.

An officer passing, with careful step and watchful eye, saw him, and stopped.

'Shall I get you a drink of water, my poor fellow?' he asked gently.

'No, thank you, Sir.'

'Is there anything I can do for you?'

'No, thank you, Sir.'

'Have you any relative or friend to whom you would like to send a message? I will gladly take it.'

'I have not—a friend—in the world.'

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The officer was silent: he had stood by many a dying man, but never yet by one who had not some loved name upon his lips. Kneeling down, he wiped the death-damp from the bronzed forehead with pitying hand.

'Is there nothing at all I can do for you, my poor fellow? do you wish for *nothing?*'

Slowly the dying man opened his eyes and looked up into the kindly, sympathizing young face.

'There is one thing, Sir—I should like,' he murmured. 'In my knapsack—my Bible.'

Opening the knapsack, the young officer took out a little well-worn Bible.

'Is there any particular part you wish to hear?' he asked.

'The fourteenth chapter of St. John—near the end—you will find something—about *peace.*'

He turned over the leaves and found the place.

'Is this it?—"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."'

Fitting words for that solemn battle-field! The world was waiting to lavish its applause and honours upon the victorious living; the

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song of triumph and their country's love and praise, were theirs; glad hearts and open arms awaited their coming to fatherland and home.

But for the lonely, friendless soldier, unknown, un-named, the *peace* 'which passeth all understanding'!

The dim eyes opened, and a look of radiant happiness fell upon the soldier's face. All was forgotten! the pain and suffering, the feverish thirst and aching wound! the heart-sick longing for the touch of a loving hand, the wearying strife and life's long toil!—all gone for ever!

The cold lips moved with broken, murmured words, and the officer bowed his head to listen.

'That peace—is mine! that Saviour—is mine! heaven—is—mine!'

The night closed round, drawing its pall of darkness over the dying and the dead. Motionless and still, with upturned face and folded hands, lay the dead body of the friendless man, with his little worn old Bible lying on his breast.

With careless glance and step they passed him by; he was only a dead soldier of the ranks! Only an unknown soldier of the ranks,

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one among the many slain! only one less to swell the victor's song of triumph, to claim his meed of England's praise! And they laid him in a nameless grave in a strange and far-off land.

'And no man mourn'd his memory, or gave to his grave a tear:
But grasping his hand in the valley of death, there was One Who held him dear.'

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GERTRUDE'S BIRTHDAY.

PART I.

GERTRUDE'S birthday! Jane was deep in the mysteries of pies and cakes, jellies and tarts; for there was to be a grand gathering of lads and lassies that evening, and she knew of old what that meant. Gertrude was helping her: that is to say, she beat a few eggs and stoned some plums, and ran away every five minutes to look at her birthday presents, and admire her new white frock, with its pretty laces and blue ribbons, or to hug her kitten, and whisper to it what fun they were going to have presently.

It was summer: beautiful, bright, warm summer, and Mr. Marchmont had taken an old-fashioned house in the country for a few months. There was a large garden all round

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it, full of fruit and vegetables and flowers. Such fruit! bonnie big apples, and tempting pears, and luscious plums. And such flowers! roses almost as big as plates! lilies and honeysuckle, and laughing pansies, and a wilderness of sweet mignonnette. We will not say anything about the vegetables, but they were there! enough to supply half-a-dozen tables.

Gertie called it her garden, because she watered and weeded it to her heart's content. There was an arbour with a big table in it, where sometimes they had tea; and there was a fountain on the lawn, and a mossy sun-dial which was Gertie's great admiration. Wallace wanted to clean it up and paint it red; but fortunately his father heard the scheme and came to the rescue. Shading the lawn were three big trees—oaks; and under these trees Gertrude's party was to have tea.

Aunt Margaret was coming to superintend everything, and Gertie could not imagine why she did not come. It was twelve o'clock and she was not in sight. At last the old gray pony was seen in the distance, and Aunt Margaret's pretty phaeton behind it. Gertie almost flew down the road to meet it, and jumping in, hugged first her aunt, then Polly, then little Burt, and then Burt's little dog.

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'Did you think we were never coming?' cried Polly. 'Burt couldn't find his shoe, and the other pair hurt him, and his old ones had gone to be mended. We found it at last: Flick had run off with it and hid it in the stable. Naughty Flick!'

Flick hung his head and got under the seat, and did not appear again till they stopped before the door. Wallace came out to meet them and took charge of the pony; and while Aunt Margaret went into the house to see her brother, Polly and Gertie walked round the garden. They did not stay there long, for there were all the presents to be seen and admired. Aunt Margaret soon found them plenty to do. Dear little Burt tried to help too. He upset the sugar-basin, and spilt the cream. In fact, he helped very much, and Flick was delighted with it all, especially the cream.

'What time are they coming?' asked Aunt Margaret at dinner: 'and how many will there be?'

'Fourteen besides Wallace and Polly and Burt and me,' answered Gertie. 'Papa has sent the wagonette, and they'll all be here by three. O, Polly, make haste!'

'I am,' said Polly, divided between a great

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wish to run out and look down the road and a greater wish to have another piece of pie.

'I am sure you have had enough,' cried Gertie, with more candour than politeness. 'If you eat so much dinner you won't want any tea.'

'O yes, I shall!' replied Polly, confidently, in no wise dismayed by such a possibility. 'You have some more too, and then you won't fidget so.'

After a little consideration, Gertie saw the wisdom of this remark, and took the advice.

'What are they going to do to amuse themselves?' asked Aunt Margaret. 'Gertie, what are you going to do with your guests?'

'Why, Aunt Margaret, there's lots to do: we are going to play every game we know, and have tea under the trees. Papa says we may do just what we like. Thomas has put up a splendid swing in the barn.'

'And I have six white mice in the loft for them to see,' put in Wallace.

His father looked up quickly. 'Wallace, I thought Thomas said that loft was a dangerous place for children.'

'Well, papa, I am not a child,' replied Wallace, calmly.

'Yes, you are,' said Polly, contradicting him

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flatly, as she was rather in the habit of doing. 'You are as much a child as I am, only a little older.'

'It is not a nice place for little girls, nor for little boys,' said their father; 'Wallace is old enough to take care of himself, and he knows where the danger is: but I cannot have any of the other children going up. Wallace, you must bring your mice down if you want to show them.'

Wallace shrugged his shoulders, but did not speak.

'You hear me, Wallace?'

'Yes, papa. I won't let any of the girls go up.'

'Nor the boys; if one goes another will want to. Be a good boy, and bring the mice down.'

When their father spoke in that tone, the children knew he was to be obeyed. After dinner Wallace fetched the mice down and left them in the barn.

At three o'clock the company arrived, and then began the fun. Gertie was the queen, of course, and a most gracious little majesty she made! not one bit too grand to kiss all her maids of honour, and allow all her courtiers unlimited license. Why, one of the audacious

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rogues actually stole the blue ribbon which tied up her bonnie brown hair, and wore it round his hat all the evening. Was there ever another queen who allowed such things as that? Ask history.

Surely such a splendid place for hide and seek was never seen before! There were shrubberies with all sorts of nooks and corners, and haystacks, and the big barn, and the orchard and the little copse down by the stream.

Gertie and Polly always hid together and ran together, and generally got caught together. Burt liked being caught; he thought that was what hide and seek was for; and if, as sometimes happened, the seekers passed him by in chase of larger game, he ran after them, crying, 'Catch me! O, please catch me!'

Everybody laughed, but Burt was everybody's pet, so they caught him and kissed him and let him go. Dear little Burt! he was quite satisfied then, and at tea-time told Aunt Margaret, with great glee, that he had been 'caughted firteen times!'

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PART II.

'HAVE you had enough running about?' said Mr. Marchmont, after tea, patting Polly's curly head. 'What are you going to do? Tell tales?'

Polly clapped her hands. 'O, will you tell us a tale, a real fairy tale? Please do.'

Uncle Richard's fairy tales were general favourites, though he often managed to squeeze a tiny bit of a moral in at the end, or sometimes nicely wrapped up in the very middle.

However, morals are not such very bad things, after all; and when tea was cleared away, the children seated themselves on the grass round the easy-chair, and Uncle Richard began:

'Once upon a time, a fairy lived on the banks of a stream in the middle of a wood. She had a lovely little home in a bed of moss, and used to go for rides on the back of a rabbit, or a sail down the stream on the leaf of a water-lily, and altogether was as happy a fairy as ever yet lived.'

'What was her name?' interrupted Polly.

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'Silver-tip; because her wings were tipped with moonshine. Now all little fairies have some work to do; and hers was to watch over the birds. A little way down the valley outside the wood, there was a house about as big as ten of the sort of house that we live in. It was called the Old Palace, and belonged to a duke; and every year he came down there and brought all his children with him for a month or two. Well, near this house there were some trees, which were the home of a colony of starlings. Silver-tip used to visit them every day and settle their disputes; for they often quarrelled. One day she heard an unusual noise, and hastened down to see what was the matter. Matter enough! The duke had come, and was going to shoot them all! Young Spot-wing had heard him say so!

'Dear me! such a commotion had not been heard among them for years. Silver-tip called them all together, and settling herself on the top bough of the highest tree, summoned Spot-wing to repeat what he had heard. He had been in the garden the evening before, helping himself to fruit, when out came the duke and the duchess and little Lord Herbert. "Dear me," said the duchess, "where is all

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the fruit this year? These trees were loaded last year, and now they are nearly bare." "It is the birds," said Lord Herbert; "Graham says he can't keep any fruit. What is the use of coming here if those nasty birds are to steal all our fruit!"

'There was a great fluttering of indignant wings at this part of the story.

'"Very well," said the duke, "if they come down here again we must shoot them; that is all."

'That was all indeed! Shoot them, the oldest colony of starlings in the county! the true blue-blooded family of Spot-wings and Black-sides? Never! they would emigrate first, and then let His Grace look out for his ancient grandeur.

'"Well," said Silver-tip, "I don't see what all this fuss is about. It is plain what you must do; you must keep out of the garden."

'All the birds looked at each other. They had never thought of such a thing as that; it had never entered even the wisest head! No one but a fairy could have thought of it.

'"There is some sense in that!" said old Fleet-wing, gravely.

'"It opens a way of escape," said Blue-tip, thoughtfully.

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'"It certainly is worth thinking about," said Limper, tucking up his game leg.

'"But we must give up our fruit!" cried Spot-wing; and all the birds stood aghast. How could they live without fruit?

'"Better to live without it than die with it," said Silver-tip, wisely. "Beside, perhaps His Grace won't stay very long. Take my advice and keep out of the garden."

'After a great deal of lamenting and whining, they agreed to do this; and Silver-tip unfolded her wings to fly home, for she was engaged to go out to tea that evening, and had to wash and iron her best white cloud dress.

'"Now be good children, and don't quarrel," she said; "you are nearly always quarrelling, Spot-wing."

'"I never quarrel without cause," replied Spot-wing, pertly; and as that very clever thing had been said before, all the birds flew at him and pecked him, till he really had cause to quarrel. In a bad temper he flew away, and sulked by himself all day; but nobody cared. At last evening came; and he saw the duke mount his horse and ride away. "There he goes!" he cried. "I will go and look over the wall, and see

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if that horrid Lord Herbert is anywhere about."

'So he hopped down from his perch, and hopped across the road and up on to the wall. "I won't go in, but I will look over the wall," he said, crossly. "I don't care for that Silver-tip. I'm old enough to mind my own business." So he perched himself on the wall and looked down. O! what beautiful fruit! it made his heart ache to think he couldn't have any. The longer he looked the more beautiful it seemed. That is why it is best to keep out of temptation.'

Polly nudged Gertie, and all the children slily looked at each other and laughed. That was a bit of moral.

'At last Spot-wing could bear it no longer. "There's no one in the garden, and it's quite safe," he said. "I'll just go and have one bite and come away." No sooner said than done. Down he flew, and just as he made a snap at a splendid plum, crack went the report of a gun, and he felt a dreadful pain all over him.'

'O! is he *died!*' cried Burt, with big tears in his eyes. 'Mend him up, Uncle Richard.'

'No, he was not dead, but his leg was

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broken. Herbert came running out of the shrubbery, and picking him up carried him to Graham. "Look! I've shot his leg," he said; "now let's mend it." So Graham got splinters and bandages and mended the leg, but Spot-wing was always lame.'

'Is that all? O, papa, did he go back to the other birds?'

'Yes; after a long while.'

'And was Silver-tip very angry?'

'So angry that she would not let him come to the grand tea-party when all the birds met together with the flowers and fairies.'

'O, poor Spot-wing! Papa, I know the moral.'

'So do I,' and 'So do I,' cried the rest, all but Burt, and Uncle Richard promised to tell him another time.

'Now what shall we do?' asked Rose.

'Come and swing. Thomas is to swing us. I will call him,' replied Gertie. 'It is such a lovely swing.'

All the children trooped off to the barn, Burt holding tight to Polly's hand. 'Let me swing too; over the hills and far away. Send me *wight* up to the sky,' he said bravely. 'I'm not 'fraid one bit.'

But he was; very much afraid indeed,

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and Polly had to hold him all the time he was in. Wallace was up in the loft, fetching a tame jackdaw who was on friendly terms with the white mice. When he came down with Rollo, as the jackdaw was called, on his shoulder, the swing was forgotten, and they all crowded round the cage to see the performance.

It was really worth seeing. Rollo hopped contentedly up and down, holding a pair of tiny reins in his beak, to which were attached the two mice. They ran before him, and seemed rather to like it. When they stopped, Rollo made a funny noise which Wallace called talking.

'When he's alone with them it is much more fun. He won't act with so many looking on.'

'What does he do when he is alone with them?' asked Polly.

'Lots of things. They ride on his back. Rollo can swing, too: he has a swing of his own up in the loft.'

'Put him in this swing,' suggested Burt, who wanted to see everything.

'Pooh! it is a great deal too big!' said Wallace, contemptuously. 'His swing is a small one—just big enough for —'

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ROLLO AND THE MICE. *See p. 87.*

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'A fairy!' interrupted Polly. 'O, Wallace! I should like to see it. Bring it down.'

'I can't: it's fastened it up.'

'Unfasten it, then.'

'And spoil it! A likely story. It's true, Polly: it really would spoil it. It is fixed up beautifully just by the beam, and I can't undo it.'

'Why can't we go up and see it?' asked Rose.

'Because the loft is dangerous. Papa said no one was to go up,' said Wallace.

'He only meant the girls,' said Frank. 'I can go up.'

'No, you can't, Frank. Papa said no one was to go: he said if one went another would, and so I had to fetch the mice down. It's an awful bore!'

Looking very cross and grumbling all the time, Frank watched Wallace take the cage back to the loft. 'I'ts a great shame!' he said. 'I've a good mind to go. Uncle Richard only meant the little boys and the girls: it's absurd nonsense not to let me go.'

'Well, he said it; I heard him,' said Polly.

'I'll go and ask him,' said Frank; and off he went. Uncle Richard heard him, and

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then said just the same as he had said before: 'It is dangerous, and I will not have one of you up there: not one. Now, Frank, you understand.'

Frank turned sullenly away, and instead of joining the others, went down the garden, and climbing a tree, sat there all by himself for nearly an hour. But as no one came to look for him, he went back to the barn, and found it deserted.

He could hear voices in the stack-yard, and knew that they were all having fine fun on the hay-stacks; but instead of going after them, he sat down in the barn, and grew crosser and crosser. Nobody cared for him, that was very evident! Nobody cared whether he played or not. After a few more sensible remarks of this sort he turned his attention to the barn, and began to look about for what he could find. The ladder which Wallace had used to get up into the loft was lying on the ground, and jumping down he seized it and lifted it up.

'I'll have a look in the loft, at any rate,' he said, defiantly. 'I'll go up the ladder and sit at the top.'

And so he did. The loft looked very tempting. It was very large and dark; he

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could not see the further end at all. Rollo was hopping about, and came to have a look at him, evidently wondering what business he had there: and the mice nibbled the bars of their cage in a most tempting manner. Altogether, Frank thought it was the nicest place he had ever seen.

While he sat kicking his heels against the ladder, he suddenly saw something white moving about at the far end. It was too big for a mouse, and too small for a cat! What could it be?

With a glance into the barn to see if any one were looking, he sprang into the loft and ran across the floor. As he ran the little white thing ran, and with a flutter and a cluck flew up among the rafters. It was only a chicken after all!

'Now I am here I may as well have a good look,' he thought to himself: so he teased Rollo, and fed the mice, and rather enjoyed it, though he felt guilty and a little anxious.

'If it were like the story-books, I should tumble down a hole and break my leg,' he said, as he began to think of going down. 'Pooh! story-books tell stories.'

As he put his foot on the ladder he heard

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his own name called. 'Frank!' In a great hurry he jumped down, and forgetting the ladder, ran out and met Wallace at the barn-door.

'Come along, Frank,' he said, 'supper is ready.'

PART III.

When Frank and Wallace returned to the house, they found all the children in the big front room. There were two tables loaded with all sorts of nice things, and the children were just remembering that they were very hungry.

'I wish I could have a birthday every day!' sighed Gertrude; 'I do love birthdays; they are the nicest things in the world.'

'Except Christmas,' said Polly.

'Well, that is a birthday too,' said Aunt Margaret.

'O, so it is! How funny! Well, New Year's Day isn't a birthday, and that's nice!'

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'Yes it is, Polly; it is the birthday of the New Year,' cried Gertie; 'papa told me so.'

'I wonder if I shall get many presents on my birthday?' said Polly, pensively. 'I wonder what papa and mamma will give me!'

'I know what I'm going to give you, but I sha'n't tell,' said Gertie. 'I know what papa is going to give you, but I sha'n't tell.'

'Then don't!' replied Polly, philosophically. 'I know what I should like; a book of fairy tales. Uncle Richard, do you know any more about Silver-tip?'

'Plenty; enough to fill a big book.'

'Will you tell it to us some time? I wish I were a fairy, and wore white-cloud dresses, and had wings! Don't you, Gertie?'

Gertie looked doubtful. 'I don't believe I should like the frock; it would feel so queer. I'd like the wings. Why, where's Burt?'

Everybody looked round, but Burt was not to be seen.

'He is with Jane, I expect,' said Aunt Margaret; 'or perhaps he has gone to sleep. Jane, where is Burt?'

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'I don't know, ma'am. He was here not long ago.'

'Go and call him, Wallace,' said his father. And Wallace went. Presently he came back.

'I can't find him anywhere. I've shouted all over the place. A piece of chicken, please, Aunt Margaret.'

Aunt Margaret stopped cutting up the fowls, and looked up in surprise. 'Can't find Burt! why, where can the child be? Wallace, you must look again, and you too, Polly.'

Polly and Gertie ran off at once, calling Burt at the top of their voices: 'Burt! Burtie! Burtie Redding! supper is ready.' But there came no answer of the pretty little voice they knew so well. Burt was nowhere to be found. They went back and told the news, and of course there was a general scamper.

'We'll soon find him,' said Rose, as they trooped out. 'He isn't far off.'

But talking was one thing and doing another. They hunted all over the place; in the barn, in the stables even, in the garden and orchard, and in fact almost everywhere; still there was no Burt.

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Then Aunt Margaret began to be frightened. 'The child must be somewhere,' she said. 'I've looked everywhere I can think of. Perhaps he is in the house all the time. I'll go upstairs.'

The words were not out of her mouth before Polly and Gertie were upstairs. They hunted in every place that was big enough to hold a cat, and in many that were not. Under the beds and in the beds; behind the doors and on the shelves; but no Burt!

'This is really getting serious,' said Aunt Margaret, looking as if she were going to cry. 'I cannot go home without the dear child; his mother would be frantic. Where is Thomas?'

'He went home half an hour ago,' said Jane.

'Go and fetch him, Wallace.' And off started Wallace, full speed, for he was beginning to be frightened. Indeed they all were. Polly sat down on the step and began to cry, refusing to be comforted.

'I'll never be happy again!' she sobbed. 'I've lost my little brother! Mamma told me to take care of him, and now I have lost him!'

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'Perhaps he went home with Thomas,' suggested Gertie. 'Let us go and meet him.' So off they ran, and met Thomas; but Burt was not with him.

'He was running about with the rest the last time I saw him,' he said. 'Perhaps he's asleep on one of the stacks.'

'No, we have looked there, and shouted everywhere!' sobbed Polly. 'O, please find him, Thomas!'

'O, we'll soon find him, Miss Polly; don't cry. This isn't a place to get lost in.'

'Well then, where is he?' demanded Polly, through her tears. 'He *is* lost!'

'We must have a regular hunt,' said Uncle Richard, coming to the door. 'Thomas, you search every place well, and if you do not find him, we must send for Mr. Redding and some men. But perhaps he is in the fields.'

Not little Burt; he was not fond of taking walks by himself.

Thomas went everywhere, and began to look very grave. At last he came to a stand-still in the barn, and looked up. The trap-door which opened into the loft was shut, and the ladder was lying on the ground.

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'Has any one been in the loft?' he asked; and all the children looked at each other.

'But he could not possibly get there,' said Uncle Richard; 'the door is shut and the ladder down.'

Thomas shook his head. 'I shut it myself before I went home, but perhaps he was in then. At any rate I'll look.'

With a very strange, queer feeling Frank saw him go up into the loft; and they all listened breathlessly as he walked across the floor.

'Fetch a light!' cried Uncle Richard; 'he can't see up there.'

Off flew Frank and Wallace, and in two minutes came back with a lantern.

'Let me go up, do papa! I know every inch,' cried Wallace; and seeing assent in his father's face, ran up eagerly.

They could hear him rustling about among the straw and bags, and Polly stopped crying to listen. Just as they were beginning to despair they heard a loud shout.

'Here he is! here he is! here he is!' And then they heard the dear little voice—very sleepy, but just the same as ever—asking, 'Is it morning now?'

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Polly screamed and cried and laughed, all together; and when Burt appeared in Thomas' arms, he was nearly kissed to death.

It was a long time before he could answer any questions. But at last they were quiet; and as he sat on Uncle Richard's knee, he told them all about it; and this was it:

'I did want to see the pretty swing so I did go up, and then I was frightened and went to sleep.'

It was quite enough; they all understood it. But one thing Uncle Richard and Wallace could not understand: How came the ladder at the trap-door, when it ought to have been on the ground?

'You must have left it up, Wallace?'

'Indeed I did not, papa; they all saw me take it down. Didn't you, now?'

There were plenty of witnesses, and Wallace was cleared. It might have remained a mystery to this day, but Frank was so glad Burt was safe, that he bravely told all about it. He was so sorry, that Uncle Richard thought he would never forget the lesson; and indeed he never did. It was a happy party that went home that night. Polly stayed with Gertie; and after

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they had gone to bed that night Polly made a discovery.

'Gertie, Frank was like Spot-wing, wasn't he?'

A sleepy little voice said 'Yes;' and that was the end of the birthday party.

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FATHER'S STORY.

'PAPA, doesn't everybody have daily bread?'

It was night, and Truda was going to bed. Her father put down his book, and took her on his knee.

'Come to say good-night?'

'Yes, papa; but I want to know something first. Doesn't everybody have daily bread? Jane says they don't. It is so easy to get bread!'

'Not always. I once knew some little children who had no bread for nearly two days!'

'What did they eat, then; porridge?'

'No; they had nothing to eat but blackberries. Shall I tell you all about it? Once upon a time, two little boys went out for a walk. It was in the summer time, and thev

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'ROBIN BEGAN TO CRY.' *See p.* 103.

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meant to go to the woods and pick nuts, so they walked as fast as ever they could.'

'What were their names?' asked Truda, settling herself to listen. Truda liked tales.

'One was called Dick and the other Robin. Well, they got to the woods at last, and found that somebody had been there already, and picked all the nuts. They did not like that at all.'

'No, I should think not,' said Truda.

'However, there were plenty of pretty things in the woods, and they soon forgot the nuts. Robin was fond of flowers, and there were many that he had never seen before; so he was delighted. Dick had his pop-gun with him and tried to kill every bird he saw, but somehow they always flew away before his shot reached them. They were very happy little boys, but after a while became very hungry boys, too.'

'Hadn't they brought anything to eat with them? Polly and I always take cake when we go nutting, papa.'

'Yes, they had cake, but they soon ate that all up, and then they got hungry again.'

'Then why didn't they go home?'

'Ah, why indeed! They could not.'

Truda looked puzzled. 'Why not?'

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'They could not find the way. When they turned to go back, they went down the wrong path; and instead of going home, they went away from it. Of course they did not know that, but they thought the wood was very long. At last it began to get dark, and then they were frightened. Dick, being three years older than Robin, tried to make out that he did not care, but he did. The woods were so dark and lonely, and there were such queer noises, that his courage slowly oozed away, and presently there was not a bit left. The sun had gone down, and the moon had come instead; but they did not like the moon, it made everything look so cold and strange. When they were too tired to walk they sat down at the foot of a tree, and Robin began to cry.'

'O dear! what did Dick do, papa?'

'He cried too. Then they went to sleep and forgot all about everything. I don't even think they dreamed. When the sun came up the next morning he found them fast asleep; so he hurried to send a little painter to awake them.'

'A little what, papa?'

'Painter. He dipped his brush in the sunlight, and then dashed it across Dick's

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eyes, and made him open them. Well, all that day the two little boys wandered about the wood, going further from home all the time. They found some blackberries and picked them, and that was all the dinner they had that day.'

'Were they in the wood another night, papa?'

'No; they got out of the wood, and found themselves in a field. There was a big stone wall in front of them, and they tried to climb over it. Dick managed very well, but poor little Robin tumbled, and hurt his foot so that he couldn't walk. Dick tried to carry him and got him to an old stack in a corner of the field, and there they had to stay all that night.'

'Poor little boys. Go on, papa,' said Truda, very much interested. 'What did they do the next morning?'

'Robin could not walk, and Dick was afraid to leave him; so they sat by the hay-stack and cried—two very forlorn little boys. They found some more blackberries in the hedge, and Dick picked all he could reach, and gave the larger share to Robin because he had hurt his foot. They felt very queer, and Robin could not keep awake; he would go to sleep, though Dick shook him every now and then, and shouted in his ear.'

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'Where was their father all the time? Didn't he look for them, papa? If I were lost you would look for me,' said Truda.

'Their father and mother were away from home, and the servant was afraid to tell any one that the children were lost till the day after. Then she told some men, and they went to look for them, and one of them sent for the father to come home.'

'I am glad! now they will be found,' said Truda, contentedly.

'At last Dick saw some smoke curling up among the trees a little way off. Now Dick knew that where there was smoke there must be a fire, and where there was a fire there must be some one to attend to it. Robin was still fast asleep, and he couldn't wake him; so leaving him under the stack, he ran as fast as he could toward the trees, and there he found a little cottage. The door was open, and inside he saw an old woman warming up some potatoes in a frying-pan. He did not wait to knock, but walked straight in, and putting his arms round the little old woman, burst into tears. She was quite frightened at first, and could not think what was the matter; but he soon told her.

'"I'm lost," he sobbed, "and Robin is

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asleep under the stack, and we are so hungry." That was quite enough for the kind old woman. She made him tell her where the stack was, and went at once and fetched Robin, and then divided the potatoes between them. There were not many, and the boys were so hungry that they were gone directly, and Robin began to cry for more. The old woman looked troubled, and said she had not got any more, whereupon Dick suggested bread and butter. To his surprise she shook her head, and said she had not had a bit of bread in the house for three days. He asked her to get some more potatoes, but she shook her head again: they had eaten the last.'

'Why, papa, the poor old woman must have been hungry too,' cried Truda. 'Had she given them her supper?'

'Yes, every bit of it. I do not know what they would have done if the old woman had not remembered that it was nearly time for the mail-cart to pass. Taking both the little boys with her, she went down to the road, and there they stood waiting till the mail-cart came up. Then she stopped the driver and told him all about it, and he promised to send some one for the children, and putting his hand under the seat he pulled out a loaf of

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bread, and dropped it into the old woman's apron.'

'And the dear little old woman had some supper too?'

'O, yes! there was plenty for all. And after supper the boys went to sleep, but they were soon awoke.'

'I know! it was their father!' cried Truda. 'The mail-cart man told him, and he ran off directly. O, weren't they all glad?'

'*I* was,' said her father. 'Robin was too tired to know much about it.'

'Why, papa! was it you? And uncle Robert when he was a little boy? Did it really happen?'

'Every bit of it.'

'And the poor old woman gave you all her supper! I love that old woman, papa.'

'And so did I. Every Saturday, after that, Robin and I used to go and see her, and take a loaf of home-baked bread and some cheese or butter, or something else nice. Our mother never forgot who fed her little boys when they were hungry.'

'Was she a very poor old woman, papa?'

'So poor that she often had gone supperless to bed, and sometimes had had nothing but potatoes to eat for days.'

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Truda's head went down on her father's shoulder. 'Papa, just now an old woman came to the door and asked me to give her some bread, and I wouldn't.'

'Why wouldn't you?'

'I didn't want to leave my fairy tales. Papa, I am so sorry.'

'Poor old woman! perhaps she will go supperless to bed, Truda.'

The quick tears sprang to Truda's eyes. 'I will never, never do it again, papa!' And she never did. No poor old woman ever asked her for bread in vain; and many a poor old woman had a nice supper bought with Truda's pocket-money when she grew older.

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OUR LITTLE BONNIE BELLE.

THAT is what we called our baby, but her real name was Mabel. She was everybody's pet, and had the sweetest and most fascinating little ways in the world. How proud we all were of her! even Evans, the cross old gardener. Our house was a little way out of the town, and stood back in a large old-fashioned garden. We children had each our plot of ground, and cultivated just what we liked. Mine was generally full of mignonnette and musk. Eda's was lovely with all sorts of sweet flowers. Tom's contained a mass of violet roots one year; it would be a cowslip bed the next, and full of carrots and turnips the third year; and so on. Walter grew roses, nothing else. He said he cared for no other flowers; but

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his roses were worth growing—they were beauties. As for Donald, he grew a little bit of everything; and Winnie grew weeds.

I wonder if you can guess a little of our characters from this description of our gardens.

When we were at play, little Mabel used to toddle about after us, getting in everybody's way. We used to wish she were old enough to join us, and yet we did not want her to grow up.

It was not often that any shows or sights came to our town, so that it created quite a sensation when the news arrived that Wombwell's Menagerie was coming. Our boys were almost wild; Winnie and I were as bad; Eda was the only one who took it quietly. She learnt her lessons as if nothing were going to happen; we could not. At last mamma told us that only those who were good and steady during school-time should go. That sobered us a bit. Little Mabel was three years old then, and was very anxious to see the 'pretty little baby-lions' that were advertised. I believe she thought they were like her 'baby-kitten,' as she called it.

At last the day arrived, and we all had a

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holiday. The caravans came straggling in, and we stood at the gate to see them pass—we girls, I mean—the boys went to meet the elephants. Winnie and I wanted to go too, but mamma would not let us; she came down to the gate and gave us strict orders.

'Can I trust you not to leave the garden, Kitty?' she said; and I felt hurt and indignant.

'Why don't you say that to Eda, mamma?'

'Because Eda does not forget so often as Kitty and Winnie do. Mabel is coming down, but if she is frightened bring her back to me.'

'Mamma,' cried Winnie, 'don't you wish I were a boy? I do; the boys go everywhere!'

'I do not wish my little girls to grow up rough and rude,' said mamma; 'boys can go where their sisters cannot.'

Winnie shrugged her shoulders; it was an old grievance with us—not being allowed to do everything the boys did.

A few minutes after, Mabel came down. She was delighted with the yellow caravans, and wanted them all to stop.

Donald, who had promised Winnie to report proceedings, came up from the town.

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THE ARRIVAL OF THE MENAGERIE, *See p.* 113.

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'Have you heard the lions roar?' said Winnie, her big eyes wide open.

Donald looked doubtful. 'I heard a noise once—a very queer noise, but I am not sure it was a lion.'

'I dare say it was. O, Donald, just run and climb on the summer-house and see if the elephants are coming!'

Eda, tired of waiting, walked after Donald.

Presently we heard a loud noise, as if people were angry or excited. Something was coming down the road, and we waited with breathless suspense to see what it was.

Suddenly Winnie screamed, 'O, Kitty! suppose one of the lions has escaped!'

This exciting solution of the mystery took away my breath.

'Shut the gate,' I gasped. 'Fasten it tight, Winnie! Can lions jump?'

Winnie did not know, and we stood looking at each other in dismay.

'If we run in,' I faltered, 'and it turns out to be only the elephants! O, Winnie!'

'I sha'n't go in,' she said, sturdily. 'I shall wait till it comes round the corner, at any rate, and then run.'

The sound came nearer, and then there was a crash: but all round the other side

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of the corner! We could see nothing, but we could hear the shouts distinctly:

'Take care, there! Out of the way! Catch hold of his head!' and other suggestive directions. Something dreadful had certainly happened.

'This is more than I can bear!' I said at last, growing desperate as the noise increased. 'I am sure mamma would let us go just to the corner. We need not mix with the crowd. Shall we, Winnie?'

For one short minute we hesitated, and then a sound which we had never heard before scattered every sense of duty, and off we ran, forgetting that Mabel had left Eda and come back to us. She was not close to us, but was gathering daisies a little way from the gate.

We found that one of the wheels had come off a caravan, and the animals inside were protesting against such an unusual occurrence by making the strange sounds we had heard. The horse had turned restive, too, and they had hard work to keep it still: the crowd had to rush back out of the way of its hoofs every few minutes. We stood on a bank and watched it all, not daring to go near. Suddenly Winnie

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turned to me with a frightened face, 'Kitty, where was Mabel?' I shall never forget the throb my heart gave at the question. We ran back as fast as we could, but Mabel was not at the gate.

'Perhaps she has gone to Eda,' I said, and we rushed off to the summer-house. There were Eda and Donald, sitting on the top—alone!

'O, come up!' shouted Donald. 'I pulled Eda up. It's easy enough. You can see the accident from here.'

'Where's Mabel?' I said, feeling my face turn white.

Eda turned round. 'Isn't she with you?' she said, in a startled voice.

We were obliged to tell what we had done, and Donald flew off to the house. But she was not there. We hunted all over the house and garden, while the servants and the boys went out into the road, and to the town. Walter found her at last, quietly playing with some dirty little children in a cottage close by. He brought her home in triumph, and we almost cried with joy over our recovered treasure. I could not understand why mamma looked so white and anxious as she held our darling in her arms. Mabel was safe, what was there to trouble about?

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Winnie and I did not go to see the menagerie. Papa would not take us. It was a dreadful punishment, and we cried nearly all the evening. Mamma took little notice of us. She sat nursing Mabel and telling her tales till her bed-time, and even then would not give her up to nurse. Once when I woke up in the night, I heard her steal out of her room to the nursery to look at the little one.

But I understood it all the next day when Mabel grew hot and feverish, and nurse told us that the children in the cottage were just recovering from scarlet fever. How miserable I felt as I knelt by mamma's side watching the beautiful little flushed face of my darling. I thought if she died I should never know a happy moment again. When the doctor came we were all sent away to Aunt Mercy's farm. Every morning and evening the boys went down to our own garden gate and heard the latest report and brought it back to the farm. I used to sit on the stile in the meadow and watch for them, and as soon as they came in sight they signalled the news. They were all sorry for me and never said one unkind word, for they saw how unhappy I was. Walter was so kind and good; it was he who invented the signals so that I

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should know the news before they came up. It was he, too, who brought the glad tidings that Mabel was out of danger. What a happy day that was! I went off by myself to the barn and cried for joy. We actually had a game that day for the first time since we came to the farm. It was a long time before we went home, and we found our little rosy Mabel sadly altered, so thin and pale, but she was as sweet as ever. How we did love and pet her! Winnie and I had learnt a hard lesson, but I am sure it made us more thoughtful and obedient.

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ELSIE'S GARDEN.

PART I.

'I DON'T see what I can do!' said Elsie, forlornly. 'I haven't any money except my sixpence.'

'What sort of doing, Elsie?' Mrs. May came to the door with a hot iron in her hand, and looked down upon her little girl.

'Why, all the good children in the book do nice things,' explained Elsie. 'They are kind to poor people, and help them; I can't.'

'We are poor ourselves,' said her mother.

'Yes, but not like some people. We don't go in rags and eat dry bread. There are lots

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of people much poorer than we are; besides, we are not unhappy.'

'No,' said Mrs. May, going back to her ironing, 'we have enough for ourselves, though there's little to spare. What do you want to do?'

'I don't know; what could I do?'

Her mother did not answer, and Elsie went down to the garden gate to watch the people pass. Presently a boy came whistling along, with a huge bunch of primroses in his hands.

'Where did you get those?' said Elsie; 'what are you going to do with them?'

'Take them home for Nanny; she doesn't often see such a bunch as that,' said the boy, with pride.

'Why doesn't she come and gather them herself? there are lots about.'

'She's lame, and can't walk far. We live right in the middle of the town, and it's a long way out to the fields. I take her flowers every Saturday, pretty nearly; sometimes one sort, sometimes another. At that cottage down there, they often give me a little posy for Nanny. Why don't you have flowers in your garden.'

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'I DON'T SEE WHAT I CAN DO?' SAID ELSIE. *See p.* 118.

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Elsie looked at the little bit of waste ground, which he called a garden. 'I don't know,' she said, doubtfully; 'we couldn't dig it up, and we can't afford to buy flowers.'

'Flowers don't cost much. If I had that bit of ground I'd grow such flowers! Nanny should have her room full, if she liked.'

The boy went off, and Elsie stood thinking.

'Elsie,' called her mother, 'this basket is ready for you to take to Mrs. Ryland.'

Elsie carried the basket to Mrs. Ryland's back door, and then ran back along the sunny road, but stopped at a little garden gate. A woman was sowing seeds. She looked up, and nodded pleasantly.

'Well, Elsie, how's your mother?'

'Very well, thank you. What seeds are you planting?'

'All sorts. This is mignonette. I always like plenty of mignonette, it's so sweet. I've got a nice lot of nasturtiums for that corner.'

'May I come and see you put them in?'

'You may come and help me if you like.'

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'I must go and tell mother. I'll be back in a minute,' said Elsie, well pleased at the idea of helping.

She was soon back, and found it pleasant work to make holes in the earth and drop in the funny-looking nasturtium seeds.

'How nice the garden looks,' she said. 'What are all the things, Mrs. Bryant?'

'Why, you've seen them often enough, Elsie; the wallflowers, and such like, and sweet-peas, and lots more. Some of them I've been sowing now, and some grow on from year to year. The beds look neat, but there isn't much prettiness yet.'

'Do seeds cost much?'

'Dear no! Do you want to grow some flowers? I often think what a pity it is you don't.'

'I'd like to, but the ground is so hard, and we can't dig it up.'

'I should think not. Look here, Elsie, if you really would like to have a garden, I'll get Dan to dig it for you, if you'll be a good girl, and help me mind the baby an hour or two now and then when your mother can spare you; and I'll give you a few seeds to begin with.'

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Elsie's breath was almost taken away. 'Really and truly?' she said at last. 'O, I'll mind the baby as often as ever you like, Mrs. Bryant!'

That's a bargain, then. I'll talk to Dan when he comes in.'

Elsie went home in a state of delighted excitement.

'And may I spend my sixpence in seeds, mother?' she exclaimed, when she had told all about it. 'I could buy such a lot with my sixpence.'

'It is your own; you can do what you like with it. Better buy a few lettuce seeds and radishes, and such like; you might sell them, perhaps, and get your sixpence back.'

Elsie could not sleep for a long time after she went to bed; and when she did sleep, she dreamed that she was a big cabbage, and somebody was going to cut off her head.

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PART II.

WHEN Elsie awoke the next morning, she heard a strange sound in the garden; and running to the window, saw Dan busily at work digging the hard ground. It did not take her long to dress and run out.

'O, Dan! how good of you! When can I begin to plant my seeds?' she cried.

Dan laughed. 'Not before the ground is ready. What are you going to plant? buttercups and daisies?'

'No, indeed! nice sweet flowers like yours,' replied Elsie, indignantly. 'Mrs. Bryant has given me some, and I have sixpence of my own. How many will that buy?'

'Just half a big geranium! I saw some marked up a shilling each in town. But I'm afraid half a one won't grow, or maybe it'll grow all on one side, or all leaves and no flowers.'

'Now, Dan! don't laugh at me.'

'Well, 'pends upon what sort of seed you want, anyhow; some's cheap and some's dear.'

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'YOU'LL HAVE A GRAND GARDEN, ELSIE.' *See p.* 126.

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'Mother said lettuce and radish, and I should like mustard and cress, and carrots and turnips, and onions, and peas, and beans, and—'

'You'd best stop there. I reckon the sixpence will about buy one of each,' said Dan, with a twinkle in his eye. 'You leave it to me, Elsie.'

It took two or three days to get the ground ready, and one evening Dan came home with a basket-full of little green things which looked to Elsie like weeds. There were also half-a-dozen little packets of seeds, and some peas and beans.

'There!' said Dan, setting them down. 'You'll have a grand garden, Elsie. Miss Mary gave me all those little plants for you, and some of the seeds.'

'O, Dan! how kind you are! What makes you?' cried Elsie, gratefully.

'There was a little girl once,' said Dan, smiling, 'who cried because a baby was ill, and ran all the way to the Grange through a thunder-storm to fetch the father, and she nursed the baby, and was such a good little nurse that the father made up his mind to do something nice for her some day.'

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'And it is something nice! it's the nicest thing that ever happened to me! I love my garden, Dan.'

'You will love it more when the flowers are up. Now I'll show you how to plant the things and sow the seeds.'

Never was a garden more anxiously watched than Elsie's. Morning, noon and night she looked for the first tiny green shoots above the sweet brown earth, and when at last they really did appear she was so glad that she was obliged to run and tell Dan. After that, the sun and air and rain made them grow fast, and when the warm summer came the garden was a pretty sight. And in the summer time when the sweet peas and white lilies were in bloom, it certainly did look lovely.

'Halloa! here's a change!' said a voice at the gate one evening, and there stood the primrose boy, as Elsie called him; but this time his hands were full of wild hyacinths and orchids.

'Where have you been?' said Elsie. 'I have not seen you for months; not since primrose time. Isn't my garden pretty?'

'I've been ill: this is the first time I've

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been out in the country. Yes: I never saw such a change in a place,' said the boy. He looked very pale and tired, and he leaned wearily against the gate, his eyes roving over the sweet flowers.

'Would you like to rest?' asked Elsie.

'No, thank you; I want to get back. Nanny will be looking out for me. These are for her.'

'Is she better?'

'No: she never will be. What are you going to give me for her? some of the pinks and sweet peas?'

Elsie looked horrified. 'Pick my flowers! Why, I never pick them except a few on Sunday.'

'What is the use of them? Nanny would so like some of those pinks; they're so sweet. You won't miss them.'

But Elsie shook her head, and drew back. 'I can't spare any. Those hyacinths are pretty.'

'But not sweet like the pinks, and Nanny loves sweet flowers. Won't you give me some?'

'What a disagreeable boy!' thought Elsie, turning away from the gate, and pretending

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to look for snails among the beans; 'I wish he'd go away.'

After waiting a few minutes, evidently hoping she would change her mind, he did go away; but so wearily, dragging one foot after the other, that Elsie's conscience smote her.

'I don't care!' she thought, as she watched him out of sight. But she did care in her heart.

'What boy was that?' asked Elsie's mother.

'I don't know his name. I've seen him often; he comes to get flowers for his lame sister.

'Is he a town boy?'

'Yes: his sister can't walk to the fields, so he comes for her.'

'He must be a kind boy. What did you give him?'

'Nothing,' said Elsie, feeling uncomfortable.

Mrs. May looked surprised. 'I thought you wanted to do something for somebody; seems to me you have lost a chance now.'

'But I didn't want to pick my flowers.'

'No; you would like to give poor folks

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bread; and those who have bread to give would rather give coal; and those that have coal want to give clothes; and so it goes on and nobody gets anything. If you mean to wait till you can give coal and blankets, you'd best make up your mind at once to do nothing.'

It was not often Mrs. May spoke so energetically, and Elsie did not like it at all. She went out and tried to forget all about it; but even watering her precious flowers did not put it out of her thoughts.

Presently Mrs. Bryant came up with the baby, and stopped for a chat and a rest. Elsie took the baby, and sat down to listen. Mrs. Bryant had been to the town, and there was plenty to tell and hear.

'I'm right sorry I wasn't a little earlier home,' she said; 'I met that boy, Tom Berner, along the road with a bunch of wild flowers for poor Nanny. If I had been home he should have had something else.'

'Do you know him?' asked Mrs. May, with a glance at her little daughter.

'Just by speaking to him at the gate pretty often, and giving him flowers. He's such a pleasant-spoken boy, and a right good

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boy I know by his kindness to his lame sister.'

Elsie's conscience gave her such pricks that she was glad to carry the baby down the road.

'What's the use of having a garden if I'm to give all my flowers away?' she thought; and she felt so cross with every one that something very like two tears would come into her eyes. 'I wish that boy wouldn't come down our road. I don't believe he has a lame sister,' she said aloud.

But as she said the words, something inside her whispered, 'Don't make it worse by telling stories, Elsie! Selfishness is quite bad enough by itself.'

'It isn't selfishness,' she said.

'Yes, it is; you are selfish and unkind!'

Elsie began talking to the baby.

'You have a garden full of beautiful sweet flowers, and you won't give any to a poor lame girl who lives among the smoke and dirt of a large town, and can't walk out into the green fields.'

'I wonder if she is a little girl,' thought Elsie. 'I wonder where she lives. I wonder —O dear! I wish I could think of something else.'

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PART III.

'WHAT makes you so quiet?' asked her mother, as Elsie stood at the door looking down the road the next evening.

'I wonder if that boy will come again? Here's Dan coming! Why, Dan, where are you going?' she said, as Dan stopped his cart at the gate.

'Would you like a ride 'long with me, Elsie? I'm going down town for some new shrubs, and you may come and see Mr. Norton's flowers, if you like.'

Like! Elsie did like. A ride with Dan was one of her greatest treats, especially when he went to the florist's; and she was allowed to walk through the greenhouses, with their wealth of lovely flowers. It was enchanted ground, and she almost feared to breathe, lest it should all disappear like the fairy palace she had read of.

Mr. Norton did not like children, but he did like Dan, and made no objection when he lifted Elsie out of the cart, and took her into the greenhouse.

'Mind you don't touch anything,' he said,

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'I WANT A POT OF MU: K.' *See p.* 134.

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and Elsie promised. She was content to look.

Presently she heard a voice shout, 'Halloa! what do you want?'

At first she was frightened, thinking some one was coming to turn her out. Dan had gone off with Mr. Norton. But peeping out of the glass door she saw the primrose-boy standing so close to her that it made her start; and a man was coming down one of the paths.

'What do you want?' he said; and the boy answered, rather sharply, Elsie thought, 'I want a pot of musk.'

The man opened the greenhouse door, and came in so quickly that he nearly ran over Elsie.

'Bless the child! why don't you get out of the way!' he said, angrily; and Elsie shrank back frightened. 'Come now, off with you, and don't let me see you here again,' he went on, pointing to the door; 'how dare you come in here!'

'I came with Dan, and he left me here. I am to wait for him,' she said, as bravely as she could.

'Then wait outside.'

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'Leave her alone!' said the boy, more sharply than before. 'It's Mr. Norton's business to turn her out, not yours. It is your business to sell me my pot of musk, and if you don't be sharp about it, I'll call Mr. Norton.'

He looked so determined that, glancing down the garden, and seeing Mr. Norton and Dan not far off, the man led the way up to the greenhouse. The boy followed, saying to Elsie, 'Come along, he sha'n't hurt you.'

There were pots of musk of all sizes; but without looking at the big ones, he turned resolutely to a shelf of smaller pots, and chose a fourpenny one.

'Is it for Nanny?' asked Elsie, with interest.

'Yes; it'll be the nicest thing I've taken her for a long time.'

'Is Nanny bigger than I am?' she asked.

'Not much, but she's older, I guess. How old are you?'

'Eleven.'

'Nanny's thirteen. How are the pinks?'

'Quite well, thank you—I mean—'; and

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then Elsie stopped, and blushed and laughed; and the boy laughed too.

'They are all right,' she said, feeling quite friendly after the laugh. 'Do you live far from here?'

'Not ten minutes off. Would you like to come and see me give Nanny this musk?'

'Yes, I should. I'll go and ask Dan. Will you wait for me?'

Dan was busy among the shrubs; but he listened and nodded. 'Be back in half an hour, Elsie; I sha'n't be longer.'

So off she went with her new friend. They went down some close, narrow lanes, stopped at a dingy house, and went up some stairs.

The boy went first, and opened a door.

'Nanny, here's some one come to see you.'

A little girl, with a sweet pale face, was lying on a sort of couch close to the open window. She looked up with a bright smile, and then exclaimed rapturously,

'Musk! musk! O, Tom!'

He put the pot in her little thin hands, and she buried her face among the sweet

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leaves and yellow blossoms. When she lifted up her head, Elsie saw two bright drops on the musk.

'Are you pleased?' asked Tom, smiling all over his face.

'Pleased! O, my dear boy!' said Nanny fondly, putting one arm round his neck as he bent over her. 'It is so lovely!'

'Well, don't cry! salt water always kills flowers,' said the big boy jokingly, with a funny look about his own brown eyes.

'Here's a little girl come to see you; the one I told you about.'

Poor Elsie felt that troublesome conscience of hers pricking her harder than ever.

'I wouldn't give your brother any of my flowers,' she said remorsefully; 'I am so sorry! Didn't he tell you?'

'Not that you wouldn't give him any flowers; he only told me about your garden. Never mind,' said Nanny, gently. 'Tom wasn't cross, were you, Tom?'

'O, wasn't I, though!' said Tom, merrily. 'You should have seen how angry I looked.'

'You didn't one bit,' said Elsie. 'I'm so glad I saw you to-day. I'll always give you flowers for Nanny.'

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been out in the country. Yes: I never saw such a change in a place,' said the boy. He looked very pale and tired, and he leaned wearily against the gate, his eyes roving over the sweet flowers.

'Would you like to rest?' asked Elsie.

'No, thank you; I want to get back. Nanny will be looking out for me. These are for her.'

'Is she better?'

'No: she never will be. What are you going to give me for her? some of the pinks and sweet peas?'

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'Is he a town boy?'

'Yes: his sister can't walk to the fields, so he comes for her.'

'He must be a kind boy. What did you give him?'

'Nothing,' said Elsie, feeling uncomfortable.

Mrs. May looked surprised. 'I thought you wanted to do something for somebody; seems to me you have lost a chance now.'

'But I didn't want to pick my flowers.'

'No; you would like to give poor folks

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'How good you are,' said Nanny, so gratefully that Elsie was obliged to give her a kiss, and from that minute they were friends.

'I'll come and see you again as soon as I can,' she said, as she wished Nanny good-bye. 'And I'll always have posies for you. When will Tom come to our house again?'

'Saturday,' said Tom. 'I'm at work again now, and can't come till then.'

'Why didn't you tell Nanny that I wouldn't give you some flowers?' said Elsie, just as he was wishing her good-bye at Mr. Norton's gate.

'I never tell Nanny anything to vex her.'

'I think you're very good,' said Elsie; but he only shook his head and laughed as he ran away. 'He is,' she said to herself, 'really good, I think. He shall have all my flowers!'

He did have a great many, and Nanny's little room was sweet with their perfume all the summer.

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BERTIE'S FIRST SACRIFICE.

'I wish I could break my heart! I do wish I could break my heart!' said Bertie, forlornly.

'Bertie!' cried Auntie May, in astonishment. 'Do you know what you are saying?'

Bertie twisted himself down from the high window-seat, in a peculiar fashion of his own, and came and stood by Auntie May's side, gazing up into her face with a melancholy look in his big, brown eyes.

'How can I get a broken heart, Auntie?'

'I don't know, I'm sure! I hope you

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never will. What do you want with a broken heart?'

'I want to offer a sacrifice to God!' said Bertie, solemnly. 'Papa read about it last night; and I heard him tell Grange that God would not despise the sacrifice of a broken heart. So, Auntie, how can I break my heart?'

Bertie was a very little boy; only four years old; and he often said and did very strange things. Auntie May thought this was the strangest of all. But she did not laugh, though she felt very much inclined; for she saw that he was really in earnest, and she would not hurt his feelings for the world. Poor little Bertie's feelings were very tender.

'I don't think that is the only sacrifice God would like from a little boy,' she said, gently. 'God would not like a little child's heart to break altogether.'

'Then can't I offer a sacrifice?' said Bertie, with something very much like a tear shining in his disappointed eyes.

'Yes, you can: one that will please God much.'

'Tell me what, Auntie May, please! I do

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so want to offer a sacrifice.' The tears were quite winked away now.

'One sort of sacrifice is to give up our own way just to please some one else,' said Auntie, trying to talk so that Bertie could understand. 'Another sort is to give something we prize very much to some one who needs it more than we do. God likes that sort of sacrifice.'

Just at this moment Auntie was called away, and Bertie sat thinking very hard.

'I 'spect God would like it better if I did it the proper way,' he said to himself. And then a thought came which made him red and hot with excitement. He would take the most beautiful thing he had in the world, and offer it as a sacrifice out in the corner of the wood-yard. Off he rushed to the nursery, and turned out all his treasures. There were his nine-pins: but one was lost. There was poor Jack-in-the-box: but the paint had got rubbed off somehow. There were toys innumerable, but all more or less injured. Bertie stood and looked at them.

'The most beautiful thing in the world!' he said slowly. 'These won't do! I mus' fin' something better.' But what? Bertie

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pondered: but before the weighty question could be decided, nurse came to take him down to tea.

Papa was out, and Mamma, Auntie May, and Bertie had tea by themselves; and afterwards mamma took her little boy in her arms and sang him to sleep: for Bertie was so fragile and delicate, that they had to give him extra love and care lest they should lose him altogether.

He was very nearly asleep when some one touched his head softly; and then mamma stopped singing, and he heard her say, 'Such silken hair, May! Such beautiful curls! Dear little head! I treasure every curl! They are the most beautiful things in the world to me!'

'Does she mean my curls?' thought Bertie, but he could not open his eyes, nor his lips: he was much too sleepy. In another minute he was fast asleep, and did not wake till the morning.

But a night's sleep had not shut the thoughts out of the restless, little mind. As soon as breakfast was over, off he went to the wood-yard, with something rolled tightly up in his pinafore. No one was there:

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the men were all in the fields, and the maid-servants in the house. Bertie had it all to himself. What do you think he did? First he gathered a number of small pieces of wood, and built them up into a little heap. That took a long time, because as fast as he put the pile together it fell apart. It was such a trouble! But he managed it at last: and then he went into the wood-house, and sat down on a stump. A pair of scissors were hanging on a fagot close by; it was this pair of scissors Bertie had brought rolled up in his pinafore. A very bright, sharp pair, nearly new! Bertie tried them on a piece of soft chip first; then on the grass outside, and some leaves. They cut beautifully. Then he went back to the stump, and sat down.

'I wonder which is the beautifulest!' he said, seizing a great handful of golden curls. There was no one to answer, and no glass in which he could see for himself: so he thought he had better make sure of the best by cutting off all!

Scharrrup! went the scissors, and down fell a handful of soft, silky, yellow curls! O, poor mamma!

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'I think I'd better offer this sacrifice first,' said Bertie, thoughtfully, gathering up the spoils in his little blue-veined hands. 'I wonder if God will like them. It's the proper way, 'cause there's nobody wants them but mamma and me. Auntie said it was a good sacrifice to give things to other people: but I like God's own way bes', and no one does want these 'cept me—and mamma,' he added. Leaving the scissors on the stump, he took the curls out into the yard, and laid them on the pile.

'Now they mus' be burnt,' he said, still talking to himself. 'I mus' fetch a match.' He knew where the matches stood in the breakfast-room, and was going to fetch them —when a sudden thought came and made him stand quite still. This was the thought: What would mamma say when she found he had burnt all his beautiful curls?

'O dear!' said Bertie: 'she will cry; I know she will; she loves them so! She said they were the mos' beautiful things in the world! O dear! what shall I do?'

The wind ran away with some of the yellow curls, and Bertie had quite a race after them. As he gathered them up,

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nurse called him to go and be dressed for a drive.

'I mus' finish my sacrifice firs',' he said, doubtfully. Somehow the pleasure had gone out of it since he had thought of mamma crying. Down he sat on the stump again, and did not move for five minutes.

'Bertie!'

'Yes, mamma.' And Bertie crept in, with tearful eyes, tremulous lips, and a handful of sunny curls.

'I'll give you my sacrifice, mamma! I meant to burn it; but, but—!'

Poor little Bertie! the disappointment was more than than he could bear, and the pretty, cropped head went down on mamma's lap to hide the fast-flowing tears. I need not tell you how mamma prized those soft, yellow curls, nor how she kissed and comforted the forlorn little boy who could not offer a burnt-sacrifice. But I will tell you one thing that she did. She took him in her arms and told him that God did not want any burnt-offerings, and that He was far more pleased with her little boy's love for his mother than He would have been with all his curls. Indeed, she made him see

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at last, that by giving up the burnt-offering for the sake of his mother, he had really offered a sacrifiee of his own will and pleasure ; the very best sort of sacrifice, after all.

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CHILDREN'S RELIGION.

THERE is a great deal of talk just now about the conversion of children, and public opinion on the subject is much divided. Some think that a child's religion is an evanescent emotion, easily excited and as easily allayed; while others think it has equal depth and permanence with that of persons more advanced in years. Some think no conversion genuine which takes place before a certain age, and others think it is never too early to lead a child to Jesus.

But although this subject has been, and still is widely discussed, it has not yet taken

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its proper place with the class which, of all others perhaps, it should most deeply interest, namely, Sunday-school teachers. Many either think little or nothing about it, or it is suffered to occupy a minor position, subservient to other and far less important interests. How many teachers pride themselves upon their scholars' uniformly good conduct and punctuality? How many teach them indefatigably, in order that they may take a first-class position at the examinations or periodical questionings? And how many seriously ask themselves the question, 'Have I done, am I doing, all I can to bring these children to Jesus?' Others, no doubt, are good teachers in one sense, but only the last named are truly doing the work of Sunday-school teachers. What is the object of Sunday-schools? Unquestionably one object is to teach children to keep holy the Sabbath day; and not only to teach them *how* to do this, but to help them to do it. Still, how can they keep it holy if they do not keep God's commandments? And how can they keep His commandments except they love Him? Every answer to the question resolves itself into

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this, the object of Sunday-schools is to teach children to love God; and this means conversion.

Some few Sundays ago a little girl went home from school with a sorrowful, disappointed face. Her mother, a woman of no decided religious principles, noticed her evident sadness, and asked what was the matter. At first Nellie hesitated, but in reply to the repeated question said reluctantly, with large tears gathering in her eyes, 'Teacher never said anything about Jesus, mother.' All that past week the child's heart had been longing for some loving counsel, and she had confidently expected that Sunday would bring a message from the Saviour through her Sunday-school teacher. To use her own simple language, she 'so wanted to be good, and thought perhaps teacher would help her;' but Sunday passed, and *no one spoke to her of Jesus!* Young as she was, she knew Who alone could teach her the great lesson of Christian love, but the timid, childish heart wanted the guiding hand and helping word.

'Nothing about Jesus!' and she had been to school twice, and had sat in her

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accustomed place listening and waiting for words which never came! What was that teacher thinking of? Perhaps, as is only too sadly possible, she herself knew nothing experimentally of the Saviour. Perhaps her heart was a stranger to the constraining love of the children's Friend, and so a golden opportunity was lost. Alas for the scholars of a Christless teacher!

The children's religion is the Gospel in its most beautiful simplicity. There are no perplexing questions to be answered; no apparent contradictions to be reconciled; no theological problems to be solved. It is just this, 'We love Him because He first loved us.' And yet there is a strange doctrine prevalent among a certain class of teachers, that every conversion, be it of man, woman, or child, must be accompanied by a prescribed amount of intense mental agony and fear. So they talk more to their class of God's judgments than of His mercies; of His anger more than of His love; and try to frighten rather than to win. We remember hearing a teacher urging a number of children, of ages varying from five to ten, to flee from 'the wrath to

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come;' describing in graphic language the awful precipice on the verge of which they stood, and the torments into which they might at any moment be plunged. No wonder the little things listened with wondering awe and dread. Surely this was not just the method of procedure which the Saviour meant His disciples to pursue when He said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me.' He does not expect from the little child the depth of feeling, the bitter repentance of maturer years. All He asks is its simple trust and its fresh, young love; the longing to be good and to do right, and the willing service of its dawning intelligence.

Most children are very reticent about their own religious thoughts and feelings. It is often difficult for them to answer when spoken to upon the subject; sometimes it is impossible for them to mention it of their own accord. Of this we heard a striking instance the other day.

A young lady called to see a friend who was ill, and on leaving, one of the children, a sweet, intelligent litle girl, took her downstairs. She was her own especial favourite

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and pet, and yet, being naturally of an extremely reserved disposition, she had never spoken one word to her on the subject of religion. Looking down into the thoughtful, loving eyes, under a sudden impulse she asked the question, 'Maud, my darling, do you love Jesus?' To her astonishment the child stopped abruptly, and drawing her into a room which they were passing, she shut the door, and clinging closely to her, burst into a flood of tears. Looking up at last with a glad, happy face, she said, 'Miss Alice, I have been praying for six months that you would speak to me of Jesus, and now you have! Every time I have been to your house, and every time you have come here, I have hoped you would say something, and I was beginning to think you never would.' It was a keen reproach to her friend, and one that she never forgot. Little Maud is now an earnest, consistent young soldier in Christ's army. No one who knows her doubts the reality of her religion, and certainly it gives her character an attractive grace which nothing else could give.

But a child's religion is no hardy, self-

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sustaining plant. It needs constant and tender care. True, we sometimes hear of friendless, lonely little ones learning the lesson of faith and love, and learning it well. But these are the exceptions, and God Himself has taken them under His own peculiar care, teaching by strange ways, leading them by unwonted paths. He makes the mind of the lonely child doubly impressionable, and then draws around it some powerful external influence. But the child in home and school has to be trained in the way it 'should go' by those to whom God has entrusted the charge,—its parents and teachers; upon them lies a heavy responsibility. Were they not '*little*' children who were brought to the Saviour in the days of old? Did He say, 'take them away, they are too young to know Me?' No! Then ought we not to imitate Him in this, and welcome the little ones to our schools?

'Open the door for the children,
Tenderly gather them in;
In from the highways and hedges,
In from the places of sin.

. . . . . .

'Pray you the Father to bless them,
Pray you that grace may be given;

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Open the door for the children,
"For of such is the kingdom of heaven."'

If the question is raised, 'Are they too young?' answer it by another, 'Do they want to find Jesus?' If they are not too young to want Him, they are not too young to find Him.

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